

# Shenandoah

THE WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY REVIEW

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## VERSE

ALAN NEAME

ROBERT BELOOF

CHRIS BJERKNES

RICHARD ASHMAN

## FICTION

MARVIN MUDRICK

The Professor and the Poet

## ESSAYS

JOHN ARTHOS

In Honor of Stark Young

HARRY MODEAN CAMPBELL

A Revaluation of Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*  
and *The Great Meadow*

## REVIEWS

ASHLEY BROWN

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Alan Neame

## THE SACK OF NEW SARUM (1955)

Blond and butch and a thousand of them  
roared like tanks through the Eastern Counties  
thundering up to the gates of Sarum  
muscular naked latter-day mounties

Blond and butch and a thousand of them  
galloped like gods through the early dawn  
sinews corded and heads thrown back  
shouting for pride of beauty and brawn

Flesh against flesh in a vice-like grip  
flank straight seat firm steel from heel to hip  
shouting where no shout resounded  
laughing where no laughter sounded  
who surround the refuge of the hideously old?  
past the timbered bungalows  
where the bougainvillea blows  
where Miss Effingham complains how Fido feels the cold  
past the monumental fake  
of Mrs Cohen-Cumberlake  
past facades of lath and plaster  
past and fast and faster faster  
fly the riders till at last  
at a word  
they draw sword  
and begin a general massacre.

The field where Constable painted  
runs red with the blood of young Woolworth's girls

The gutters of antiquated  
lanes rattle ringing with cultured pearls  
Pearls and blood and amber beads  
cover the alleys and choke the meads  
Powder compacts and locket chains  
litter the cobbles and clog the drains.

In the neat Municipal Gardens  
lies Major Trimm with his head hacked off  
Seventeen elderly People's Wardens  
share a bed with Emily Trough  
The Pantings still in their velvet chokers  
lie with their groom in the red hot pokers  
Commadore Brewer and Reverend Creep  
meet their God on the compost heap .

By the Memorial Drinking Fountain  
lies chartered accountant Gavvelston-Benn  
Scored in red his final accounting  
swords write readier than the pen  
Even straitly laced Miss Newman  
surely the honestest honest woman  
Though she never lied before  
lies her last with half a score.

#### EPISODE 1

Packed in S. Stephen's Parish Hall  
sit women of uncertain age;  
a lady who has Heard The Call

Is lecturing them from the stage  
and now she fiddles with her hair  
and now she thumbs The Sacred Page

Abstractedly the women stare  
their hearts in the Committee-Room  
where lesser ladies now prepare

Strong tea and flabby macaroon;  
 each in her inattentive turn  
 hears the anticipatory tune

Of kettle cups and bubbling urn;  
 the lecturer is in her stride  
 with winsome smile: *Let's try to learn*

*The lesson of this Whitsun-tide*  
 (too late too late, a curl unrolls)  
*when my dear husband was alive*

*He always . . . (winsome smile) . . . S. Paul's*  
*Epistle . . . (pat) . . . beyond the grave . . .*  
*(smile, pat) . . . our Church Schools . . . (drat these curls) . . .*

*Whose Arm controls the restless waves . . .*  
*(pat) . . . Vicar never late before . . .*  
*(pat) . . . (bang) . . . (crash) . . . Accident? What? SAVE*  
**ME! NAKED RIDERS AT THE DOOR!!**

O It's up with the pommel  
 & down with the blade  
 & it's broken the stove  
 & the pine balustrade  
 & smashed the hydrangea  
 & trampled the fern  
 & shattered the cake stand  
 & battered the urn  
 & ground back to powder  
 the Cohn china cup  
 & burned through the kettle  
 that sang on the hob  
 & stove in the window  
 & spattered the curtain  
 & butchered those ladies  
 of ages uncertain  
*adjournin' the meetin'*  
*past 'o pe ov resumin'*  
 & put to the sword  
 the entire Mothers' Union.

O it's where they sat ranged in  
 their prim rows of ten  
 there's a fret work of rupture  
 & varicose vein  
 & heads & limbs litter  
 that neat parquet floor  
 in a sticky solution  
 of sweet tea and gore:  
 thus perished the widows  
 & lovers of vicars  
 in a welter of corsets  
 & black cotton knickers

As for the lady whose lecture had been so informative  
 & eloquent  
 She suffered an incomparably worse fate than any horror  
 related even in the Old Testament.

By this time were  
 Dead the Dean  
 & cancelled all his Chapter  
 Dead the Mayor  
 & purged his Corporation  
 Dead the Recorder  
 brainless all his clerks  
 Dead the Directors  
 of the Auto-works  
 Dead Miss Noggin  
 of the Tudor Pub  
 Dead Lord Tapline  
 in the County Club  
 &

Dead old charitable Lady Bates  
 Whose face had launched a thousand garden fetes.

#### EPISODE 2

Life was so gay at the Laundry

That Wednesday afternoon  
There was pecking & pinching & necking  
Necking in the ironing-room  
*Ammonia fumes are so heady*

Ernie came in from the garage  
The Manageress was out  
'Lil, you give over that sorting—  
'Time for a tickle & stout.'  
*Ammonia fumes are so heady.*

Agnes she stood by the steam-press  
She heard the baskets creak  
Sighed: 'I won't never be courted  
'Not in a thousand weeks.'

Now Nora she was a deep one  
Not one for capers or larks  
She worked in with her Auntie  
Unpicking laundry marks

Never went home of an evening  
With under a dozen hanks  
'A girl's got to plan for her future  
'As for that Ernie—*no thanks.*'

Agnes heard the glasses clinking  
Agnes heard the baskets groan  
And she heard Lil's randy giggle  
'Ernie, my only own.'

Agnes leaned & sobbed on the lever  
Sobbed as she dabbed at her tears:  
'I won't never be wedded  
'Not in a hundred years.'

Nora she laid down her scissors  
Nora she drew out the thread  
And she said with a glint in her glasses:  
'Cheer up, you'll soon be dead.'

'Always groaning and moaning  
'For what can never be  
'Give over can't you for gawdsake  
'You lump of misery.'

O, I'm not clever like Nora  
Haven't got no glamour like Lil  
Though she's welcome I'm sure to Ernie  
Not my idea of a thrill  
*Ammonia fumes are so heady*

O, I wish I could go on the movies  
So proud Ernie in vain would fall  
O, I wish I could marry Burt Lancaster  
Without any clothes on at all  
*Ammonia fumes are so heady*

Whereupon  
as in slow motion  
The double doors swing open  
To trampling in the yard  
With pale indignant glances  
Angelic-eyed advances  
The ivory-golden horde

Sweat on muscle gleaming  
Blood on swordblade steaming  
Each archaic mask  
Slow in bright formation  
With deliberation  
Sets about its task

Drawing rein where Agnes is  
Spellbound in paralysis  
Bending from his seat  
One gigantic cavalier  
Butcher than Burt Lancaster  
Lifts her off her feet

Strips her uncomplaining  
For his lips upstraining  
    holds her to him fast  
Slow his charger paces  
Dreamlike his embraces  
    *—This is home at last*

By chasms overpowering  
Of laundry baskets towering  
    Toppling to their base  
They pursue their journey  
Though the screams of Ernie  
    Ring to outer space

Unperturbed through deserts  
Of soap power & blizzards  
    Of laundry bills they ride  
Nor with sense of urgency  
Where released detergents  
    Roll their fummy tide

Through jungles equatorial  
Of humid nightgowns foral  
    Clothes-pegs forkly-tongued  
Till beyond the boundary  
Of that stricken laundry  
    They behold the sun

Then with bulging biceps  
Rippling golden triceps  
    And a pleasant laugh  
And an easy gesture  
This Oedipean rescuer  
    Cuts the girl in half.

Through the cattle market ride  
Flashing sword & fiery eyed  
Angels naked bright & fair  
Striking down the auctioneer  
Buyer valuer & seller

Weigher filing-clerk & teller  
 Counter-jumper bawd & broker  
 Banker bailiff welfare-worker  
 Usherette & ticket-collector  
 Turf-accountant tax-inspector  
 Antique-dealer fancy-baker  
 Doctor dupe & undertaker  
 Agents of the Board of Trade  
 Engineer & nursery maid  
 Lady helps & farmers' wives  
 Silk-&-wool about their thighs  
 Writhe like serpents & expire  
 While the city catches fire

### EPISODE 3

There is a grove; within, a gothic hall  
 Where gothic pedants sit, and dog-toothed all.  
 Their sharp arch-pedant points his gothic wit;  
 His frousy minions fear the bite of it:

Gentlemen! Quiet please! *Rat-tat-tat!*

There are some points I wish to raise:  
 The regulation weekday hat  
 Must *not* be worn on whole-school-days:  
 Please see that everyone obeys

*If masters would remember that . . .*

Remember that in many ways  
 Conformity to College Rules  
 May seem a bore, but always pays.  
*Hurrah for College! Up the Schools!*

*If masters would remember that . . .*

Some boys who get a sudden craze  
 (Don't think I'm straining at a gnat)  
 For writing poetry or plays  
 Are only going through a phase

*If masters would remember that . . .*



Such exhibitionistic traits  
 Must cease—and so must football pools.  
 Please beat, to minimize delays.  
*Hurrah for College! Up the Schools!*

If masters would remember that . . .  
*Non Satis*: well, for Gooch and Glaze  
 That's scarcely to be wondered at,  
 But Bright Boys' form-masters amaze  
 Me by their damning with faint praise  
*If masters would remember that . . .*  
 Hoping no after interest weighs  
 I note bestowed on knaves and fools  
 A prodigality of A's . . .  
*Hurrah for College! Up the Schools!*

If masters would remember that . . .  
 VI Form reports, then. Weinbaum.J's?  
 Could Ponson throw some light on what  
 Marked preference this boy displays  
 For a career?—*Ne vous déplaie*  
*(If masters would remember that)*  
 —*Armaments-king. His father says:*  
*With atom-bombs on Istanbul*  
*He'll set the Channel Ports a-blaze.*  
*Hurrah for College! Up the Schools!*

*The Headmaster facaetiously makyth hys Testament*

When Weinbaum lays the College flat  
 With atom-bombs and *gamma-rays*  
 My stall in chapel where I sat  
 Festoon with radio-active bays  
*If masters would remember that . . .*  
 And give three rousing Hip Hurrays!  
 Then as the smouldering debris cools  
 Let fully qualified M.A.s  
 Shout: FLORVIT : FLORET : FLOREAT :  
*Hurrah for College! Up the Schools!*

He ceased: his silence but impressed the more;  
The grimy gargoyles filthily adore  
This dog-eared counterpart of thundering *Jove*  
Who toasts his buttocks by the 'Tortoise' stove  
And by the twitching of his mouth betrays  
His satisfaction at their murmured praise.  
He hesitates & frowns; in wrath he hears  
A noise displeasing to pedantic ears;  
Discreet approval for his speech is drowned  
By screams of anguish from the hockey ground  
And then the shattering of some fragile mass,  
*Ossas of china, Pelions of glass,*  
That grows more violent as the seconds pass;  
The sash cords tremble, windows crack & break;  
The very hall's deep-laid foundations quake;  
When hot-foot to the hall, with failing breath,  
Faint messengers arrive, announcing Death.  
First, the Head Monitor, with frenzied eye  
And rattling teeth, cries out: *Prepare to die!*  
And hard behind, the Classics-master's wife,  
Whom lonely Death cuts off from double life;  
Her wild despair re-echoes through the hall:  
*The Troy of Mrs Pilkington must fall!*  
And last, the Chef in bloody disarray  
Prophetic groans: *No second helps today!*  
Upon the instant, with triumphant shout,  
Irrupts upon them the avenging rout.  
Straightway these *Centaurs* of a later age  
Fall on their prey with calculated rage.  
In vain the cringing victims interpose  
Markbooks between their faces & their foes;  
While some, who mortarboards more boldly wield,  
Trust to a plywood & betasselled shield.  
Some with a show of spunk, to stem th'advance,  
Grappling a ruler, couch it like a lance;  
While others in close combat strive in vain  
To stab at angels with a fountain pen.

Shield, lance & dagger ineffective prove,  
And don & pupil make their last Remove.  
Now to the failing light of failing eyes  
Reflects a fiercer light from lowering skies,  
As to the darkening firmament aspire  
Bright pyramids of purifying fire.  
Flames from the burning roof, & boiling lead  
Confound the living and engulf the dead;  
While the indomitable riders wring  
The necks of the jackdaws & their vulture king.  
Then, moving on from *Academè's* groves,  
They slay the surviving citizenry in droves . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Until there was no one left alive in the entire city  
But moved by pity  
And struck with admiration  
At their wholeness amid the general castration  
Prevailing among the former inhabitants of the site  
The riders sheathed their swords at the onset of night  
And out of the bloody holocaust and rape  
Allowed the errand boys  
And garage mechanics  
to  
ESCAPE

John Arthos

## IN HONOR OF STARK YOUNG

Stark Young, when he reminds us of the belief that the splendor of God is so great one cannot look upon His face without being consumed, reminds us also that this is true of experience generally:

In an odd way the same is true of man with regard to all his experience—with objects, say, or actions or thought. He does not see the central light of experience, the essential quality that characterizes it and distinguishes it from everything else. He prefers instinctively to flee the point, to blur it over, to evade it, losing himself in a looser, easier, more elusive generality . . . And at the same time, by a yet deeper instinct, he is pursued by the essential, as he is by the idea of God; there is something in him deep down that waits for the fundamental characteristic to appear to him to take him, to reveal the experience to him.<sup>1</sup>

His own writing, the fiction, the criticism, the character sketches, and the early poems and plays, continually express the same sense of splendor, and are in their different ways efforts to acknowledge the power and authority of light such as this. Belief, of course, is the substance of these efforts, and the argument Stark Young follows in affirming his faith is that art reveals to us the essential quality of experience, or what he more often calls the *idea*, this brightness at the heart of life:

And that purity which we discern in the great artists' natures—and to a lovable extent in most minor artists, too—and in great saints, arises from this; what they dream and desire is for its own end and perfection, free of considerations outside itself and untouched by the intrusion of another world of aims. For them the idea or dream can alone be important; and by the side of it they are not even aware of "all other idle and unreal shapes attendant on mortality."<sup>2</sup>

The warmth and charm of Stark Young's writing comes from this, from his reminding us with every word, and with the grave

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<sup>1</sup>*Glamour*, New York: Scribner, 1925, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

and elegiac tone, of the force of our inward life, not as Henry James with his "awarenesses," but as a communicant and celebrant. He leads us to read his writing and to regard it as the heroine of *The Torches Flare* thinks of herself and her art:

She could see herself at some moment in a play, her body lifted with these trees, her mind filled with this quiet and passion; and in the midst of that would come the living idea arising like the star out beyond the edge of the land there. And she could hear the words rise to their eternal place, could hear herself speak them, and, in the pause that followed before the applause began, a hush in her own soul, a waiting for the wood and the dusk there under the moon.

She wondered if art was always like this, was something out of the memory, a voice of something past, the immortal come to us out of death. She wondered if art is like the return of a soul to its old life, of a ghost to its memory.<sup>3</sup>

The spirit of almost all his writing has the spirit of conversation, about and around plays and acting and the soul, and it moves us not only from its reticence, for what it does not say, but also because it is all that one can say. Even *So Red the Rose*, for all its actuality, is more the recording of conversation than anything else, with all the tensions between expression and reticence, while in other novels he cannot withhold his own additions. He has said that he himself was chiefly educated by conversation—"The things that I heard and saw, and that my elders had seen and talked about, gave me the essential foundations of whatever education I have acquired and whatever understanding of life or of art"<sup>4</sup>—and I think the instruction his writing can so often give depends on a similar trustiness in us. The value he gives to restraint and reticence may also serve to justify our taking his writing in such a way: "I have sometimes thought that the measure of our inner intensity is our shyness in revealing it, but such very likely is not true: the very last and ultimate flowering of all human experience is its sharing and revelation."<sup>5</sup>

Now and then he tells a story with the perfection of art:

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<sup>3</sup>*The Torches Flare*, New York: Scribner, 1928, p. 298.

<sup>4</sup>*The Pavilion*, New York: Scribner, 1951, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61.

Maria's cabin was as simple as her needs must have been. There was the one room, a big fireplace, a bed, and in the corner a pile of cotton seed. I do not recall how many children she had—eight or ten perhaps—but I do remember that there was no question of “house chillun and yard chillun,” which is to say those of a husband and those of a passer-by, since Maria had never had any husband. She cooked at the fireplace, in an iron oven with legs to it; the ashcakes were made of corn meal, water, and salt, and were baked on a shingle in the hot ashes. The children slept for the winter, which could be freezing at times, in the pile of cotton seed. They dug into the soft, velvety seeds, scooped them up and around and slept like rabbits in a burrow. In the summer they slept on the floor or on the ground anywhere outside that was coolest.

Across the road from Maria's, set back in a weedy lot, was a two-room cabin where there was an idiot girl. She had great heaving breasts, and eyes like the eyes in a mask. When the others in the house went out to work in the fields she was chained to a bedpost and the door was padlocked. From Maria Wimbush's you could hear her crawling about, dragging the bedstead after her, throwing a chair against the wall, yowling, hooting, and singing. Great screams went up at times, great moans and then curses like incantations and violent cries from the poor creature, out of the locked, half-rotted house.

Sometimes at the opera when the German tongue is heard going on in Wagner's tumultuous effects, and after some violent sequence of semi-impotent climaxes strung along too frequently one after another, I have thought how someone said that, for all the genius, it was still Alaric battering at the walls of Rome, and then I thought of this poor wild girl in that cabin set back from the road, and have wondered about it all.<sup>6</sup>

But I think that the conversation, the comment, the criticism, is more often important for what it communicates of faith than in its finish. So, for example, when he is speaking of Lena Dandridge, the actress, in one of his novels—her “most beautiful quality was the pity and love in her heart, and her wish that you might have your own soul.”<sup>7</sup> And what Stark Young is saying here is not

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>7</sup>*The Torch Flare*, p. 181.

something to guide the reader in going on with the story or even in helping him to understand how the developing circumstances of her life will be turned to use. Rather, he has left the novel in order to press a point about what should always have value for us, to tell us why it is that we love some people and neglect others, and he is also admonishing us so that the crassness of modern life shall not move us from the desire that everyone should possess his own soul, as free as a bird to make his own flight.

All this belongs to the novel, not in its structure, but in its impulse, in the continuous effort to celebrate what is to be cherished in life, for expression in art is itself the power to give life. What he means is that grace and graciousness and love and wit and style and intellect seem to put life into our power for a while, they are all that do. So with Lena in her attitude toward the part she was acting, "Her respect for the soul of the character she played would give it all its truth, and her gentle love would give it all its music."<sup>8</sup>

The instruction comes directly from Plato when the teller of the story needs to encourage a young boy who has just learned something of brutality, but it is also a lesson the story-teller takes for his own, so important to him he must offer it to us whatever it costs his story as an interruption:

"The paths of darkness beneath the earth shall never again be trodden by those who have so much as set their foot on the heavenward road, but walking hand in hand they shall live a bright and blessed life, and when they recover their wings, recover them together for their love's sake."<sup>9</sup>

And it is, of course, the narrator's own faith he expresses when he speaks of the two lovers:

If only they had died then. The soul of each had sought and found its perfection; and for that moment, at least, in their lives each one might have said: "I have become universal. I see things in their divine innocence."<sup>10</sup>  
The faith in the truth, this is what is moving in such writing

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 153.

and such talk, and perhaps it always comes back to that line he quotes so often from Leonardo, the words that come to one's lips as it were of necessity, through tenderness—"How sweet the people's faces in the streets."<sup>11</sup>

Thought is part of the sort of love and lovingness of this writing, and the wholeness and range of Stark Young's thought brings its authority and pressure to his accents, and at times, when the Neo-Platonism is most developed, we are almost persuaded that thought can pass into passion.

The notion of a central force to life is perhaps the beginning of his thinking: "Life, the energy, the living essence—Pirandello's *Stream of Life*, Bergson's *Vital Urge*—goes on, finding itself bodies or forms to contain and express it."<sup>12</sup> This is a statement from what may be his most sustained critical work, *The Theater*, and he develops the idea in many ways: "Life, rising in us, discovers forms for its soul, in acts, in ideas, in art. The life expressed in one of these parts of life can also find forms for itself in other parts."<sup>13</sup> "The energy or stream of life by which creation arises, a discovery of bodies that will contain and express it, goes on and on. Within it are the two principles, one of which seeks always to discover its due form and to maintain it, and the other which tends to break down this form. This expresses the very essence of what is living, of the fire that in due time 'on the ashes of its youth doth lie, consumed with that which it was nourished by'."<sup>14</sup>

What gives this notion its special importance as a fact for faith to work with, is the nature of man's desire, the desire he feels to work within himself, with himself, towards the expression of this force, the abstracting of ideas and their realization.

Around us in the world we see forms, shapes, into which characteristic forces of nature seem to have found embodiment. A tree, a horse, a flower, any one of these fades or disappears, it goes back to dust; but the form returns in others of its kind and is the idea of it that remains with us, which is what Meleager meant in his poem,

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>12</sup>*The Theater*, New York: Doran, 1927, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.



The garland fades on Heliodora's brow,  
But she shines out, garland of the garland.

We see these forms in nature, and in ourselves likewise we desire forms, patterns of our mental world that we call conceptions, within which our inner stream of life finds shapes that will contain it. We would have ideas as new bodies into which the souls of our experiences have been reborn. We would have ideals, which are projections, though feeling, of our intellectual preferences to the completeness that we desire.<sup>15</sup>

This desire, this love of beauty, which must pass, leaving its sad reminders, and more beautiful for the sadness, like a red rose surviving the death of Caesar, is perhaps as well described as a sharing of Platonic thought as anything else, and this we may judge from a certain summing up he offers in an autobiographical essay:

I have, for example, spent days in the Sistine Chapel, read Vasari's account, read the sonnets, but seem to myself to have, and probably do have, but a sorry, skimming knowledge of Michelangelo. I have read often Plato's dialogues on poetic inspiration, something of Plotinus, and all of our Edmund Spenser with his Neo-Platonism. And I have looked hard at Botticelli and his paintings of Venus and the rising from the sea, the Becoming as it approaches the Being, the Corporeal as it shares the Incorporeal; I perceive the ardent Neo-Platonism in them, some of it expressed in the rhythms of the composition, which constantly moves out of the frame—or into it—as if the idea in the picture were only a part of some ideal Whole. I see there the longing for what has gone before, a sickness for the ideal, and a sense of the passing not so much of life, which is the preacher's theme, but of beauty, which is the poet's.<sup>16</sup>

The eternal duality, the body and the ideal, the body and the conception, and so by extension the actor and what he does, what he works with, is for Stark Young a more immediate crux than any other problem of the arts.

And in the end, when all is said, humanity is but a microcosm; and we merely perceive little sets of relationships

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<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>16</sup>*The Pavilion*, p. 52.

that we call the universe. In this little universe of ours we are turning always toward some manifestation of our life in the person of some figure in it, some fellow vehicle and exemplar of living. The function of acting is to express in terms of a human body some vibrant region of this life of ours; to set before our eyes some epitome of men's vitality; to add to the character and event some element of abstraction that goes beyond and above them, something of that pure and separable element that arises from every artistic expression. For one of the finest ends of acting is to weave an abstract pattern, some pattern of idea, something approaching pure design in its ideality. This makes a kind of truth in itself. It can exist apart from its immediate implication; and may remain with us as beautiful even when the precise moment that conveyed it fades, as the soul might remember the noble harmony of the lines in some forgotten scene. This is the object of all art, to create in reality abstraction and in abstraction reality; to complete, in sum, our living for us. It is this that gives to art something of the quality of a dream, the fear for its possibility, the urgency of its desire. And it is this in art that makes life follow it.<sup>17</sup>

The process of the arts, in short, is re-incarnation. "In great art a man seeks even more than in his own flesh a body for that which he most wishes to preserve in himself."<sup>18</sup> I suppose this follows from a more general idea of communion: "St. Paul's saying that we live in one flesh is not alone true of human beings but of men and the arts as well, they are parts of one another's bodies."<sup>19</sup>

The term Stark Young uses again and again to signify that a work of art has been achieved is *idea*, and the term now is not so much Platonic as Coleridgean or more generally evolutionary: "The purpose of art is to express experience, to dilate the reality of the moment, to establish upon the flux and uncertainty of things the eternal and constant fact of the idea."<sup>20</sup> "Out of his own substance the artist evolves forms, ideas, as out of the growing substance of a forest the tree form evolves, and then in turn the

<sup>17</sup>*The Flower in Drama*, New York: Scribner, 1925, pp. 38-39.

<sup>18</sup>*Glamour*, p. 87.

<sup>19</sup>*The Theater*, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup>*Glamour*, pp. 44-45.

forest form from the trees, taken together among themselves. He is driven on to creation by his desire to free his idea from the confusions and accidents of the original material and to leave its essential."<sup>21</sup> And so there is the praise of Duse, "the sense of a body that had no existence apart from its idea."<sup>22</sup>

I rather think his most telling expression of this line of thought is in the comment on the Sansovino façade of the Library of St. Mark's, where he is so conscious of the Florentine's intellect maintaining its power even by the Adriatic:

The late moon had come up now and the piazza lamps had been cut off save for a few here and there. Venice had grown quieter, for the evening gaieties were not yet arrived. From my far corner of the great square the noises of the city seemed far away. The dip of an oar measured the silence. The hour seemed to be made up of the silence that preceded a sound and the silence that followed it. But the measure of the oar was like a living pulse, there was nothing sterile or mechanical in it. And the rhythm of it everywhere, I knew, would be moving in the sleeping water the reflections of the stars. The moonlight now was creeping across the wide piazza, strangely white; it touched the firm elegance and definiteness of the marble columns where they rose from the silver pavement. I watched the light climb higher and higher and rest at length on the frieze, whose figures sprang with that into life again, and whose elegance settled upon it. The mind, I thought, has its passionate distinction, and the magnificent chaos of emotion in us has, nevertheless, its deep urgency of order and pattern and its cold unity underneath. And in great art like this I could see the gorgeous and august necessity in life; and the heroic need in a large nature for moral domination of its powers.<sup>23</sup>

From such insights and affirmations Stark Young takes two directions, sometimes more mindful of the importance of the intellect in art, at other times satisfied with the Dionysiac. Taking the first direction he will praise an actor for his "hint of some ungovernable scope of feeling and thought and image, more of a

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<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup>*The Three Fountains*, New York: Scribner, 1924, pp. 180-181.

<sup>24</sup>*Glamour*, p. 52.

kind of cosmic discovery;"<sup>24</sup> and in one of his most affecting character sketches he acknowledges the power of the Attic light and all that Greece stimulates, a power not usually dominant in one so deeply taken with the praise of Italian luxuriance. He has imagined a young American, coming out of some uniformity and nervousness and flatness, walking along the road to Eleusis, among the ilexes and pines by the Ilyssus and in the bright sun of Athens.

He had not thought of God at all, he had not been filled, comforted. That undying shapes and images had arisen in his mind he knew, deities, immortal figures of the various world. The clear outlines of trees; the infinite light upon the ground and over all things; the certainty and transparency of shadows; the columns of marble set against the sky; the ground near by, the vista toward the hills and the inland country; time, ascent and descent, the due rhythm and course of things—he had felt a sense of permanency not within himself, not within his own mystery but in that part of himself that lived in those forms and qualities that appeared to him in the world around him there. He had felt the sense, not of being quiet in some mystical eternal arms or of being stirred with some unrest, but of moving toward some perfection. And if then, along Ilyssus and in that clear light, he had thought of God at all, it would have been as of some Ultimate Mind by which, if he could know Him, all things among themselves might be perceived.<sup>25</sup>

For Stark Young Italy, too, of course, is on the side of intellect, for all its passion, something he will always emphasize whenever he thinks of the mysticism of the north, what he names the turgidness of Anglo-Saxons, all that shies from the clear outline. And nowhere, I think, has his thought that follows from this been more corrective than in the comparison he makes of Italian and English literature, the one complicated with "a profound poise, a subtlety that comes not of suggestions of the unknown or the infinite, but of combinations of exact expressions of thought and renderings of experience."<sup>26</sup> The other, giving more value to the individual, the spontaneous, the brooding. And so, there was a searching of the heart for him—(the Italian lady had started all

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>26</sup>*The Three Fountains*, p. 147.

this by a remark expressing the common enough opinion in Italy, that she read English poetry because it was more restful)—“What if, in sum, we come to think of poetry as a social and radiantly definite and communicable art as well as a beautiful spiritual solitude?”<sup>27</sup>

But when he does not follow this direction, he looks towards what he finds most perfectly in the *Bacchae*: “. . . the god of ever-springing life and enthusiasm and ecstasy, could not be bound; prison-bars, fetters, no obstacle had power to hold him fast. Only the forms of his own passion and of his own thought and his own motion could contain his divine life.”<sup>28</sup> And again:

. . . the god of range and ecstasy, of our release into the primitive and infinite, of the soul moving toward frenzy, not at home in this world and never to be so; it will forever lose itself in some exaltation and power and will forever pass even the luminous boundaries of light and inspiration; and by the presence of something within itself that cannot be defined or formally expressed, it is brought to participate in some triumphant and mystical, half-hidden revelation.<sup>29</sup>

So it happens that at times even art is submerged in the general consciousness, in the wonder whether man is indeed separate from nature, and this wonder he once speaks of as belief:

. . . in the midst of this life in the mountainous country I felt always growing clearer to me the belief that body, idea, and spirit are for us as simply and wholly a part of the surrounding universe as the trees or the stars or the falling of water; and that there can be no miracles, not because they are contrary to possibility and fact, but because what we call a miracle is itself the fact, which we judge to be super-human and supernatural, because we cannot follow it to its source. But still the seasons came, the moon and the stars, all in their due moments, and I was baffled and comforted and whipped by their rightness. I have always been led by a sense that the natural world is our tutor and redeemer, and that genius, even, is only an intelligence that works like nature.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

<sup>28</sup>*Glamour*, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup>*The Pavilion*, p. 147.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

<sup>28</sup>*Glamour*, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup>*The Pavilion*, p. 147.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

Fiction and history alike are for him works of imagination, and both are to reveal the truth. The truth of history, he said once, is 'a combination of actuality and remoteness.'<sup>31</sup> His novel, *Heaven Trees*, begins, "I can remember as if it were yesterday that third Wednesday in April at Heaven Trees."<sup>32</sup> That third Wednesday was remote indeed, some time in the 1850's, but the story was presented as an actuality in which the author was moving as a young boy, taking to himself a brother and sisters of another generation. This at least partial identification of fiction and history depends on a notion of realism Stark Young supposes to be the principle of any re-creation, "the pressure of life from within out, the permeation of the entire object with its spiritual actuality."<sup>33</sup> And that combination of the remote and the actual has as a corollary the judgment of the current by the past. All that loving writing about the South is as much a criticism of the Northern, commercial way as Faulkner's is, and just as Faulkner's South is peopled with ghosts of whom their author is one, so Stark Young's:

Ours, when I was growing up, was a country peopled with ghosts, warm, close, and human; the dead were often as present as the living. Naked chimneys of burnt houses; ruined cemeteries where the dead had sometimes been kicked out of their graves and left lying under the sky overhead; tombstones thrown down. . . .<sup>34</sup>

I remember how surprised I was at those who spoke of ghosts as terrifying or scary; it seemed to me that any ghosts I should care to see would be my own kin; they would be only kind and entertaining. By the time I was seven I felt myself one of a large clan who loved me.<sup>35</sup>

For Stark Young the sense of kinship, and the going back to the days of heroism and nobility in the Old South, made this identification with the ancient glory a part of the great historic life. The sense of the community, of the hundreds of kin one belonged to, the knowledge of their individuality, all this was the particular

<sup>31</sup>*Glamour*, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup>*Heaven Trees*, New York: Scribner, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup>*The Flower in Drama*, p. 161.

<sup>34</sup>*The Pavilion*, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup>*Feliciano*, New York: Scribner, 1935, p. 5.



phase of that consultation of the life force within oneself, that response to life an artist accepts. And so he could speak of Grandfather McGehee: "He was a sort of underrunning love in the minds of all branches of the family; for years he had been a kind of spiritual persistence and a place of quietness in our thoughts."<sup>36</sup> Measured against such lovingness so much of modern life in America was despicable. Christmas, changed "from what was once an old sweet season into a general dread or horror or jazzed exhaustion. Or Easter, killed with sentimental publicity and with florists' pushing. Or Mother's Day, and Salesmanship. And all the delicate things, infinitely human, infinitely deep and intangible, old in the race, exploited."<sup>37</sup>

The question of genius apart, in values and ideas the difference between the two writers, Faulkner and Stark Young, is not great. Both live intimately with the past of the South, and both accept the idea of its glory as in part the generous cultivation of sentiment and in part as courage. It is by their sense of kinship with the past, that both oppose the common enemy, commercialism. Faulkner most often expresses his criticism of the present age in portrayals of the invasion of sensitive souls by crass and ugly forces, where Stark Young is pretty much content to write something closer to history, to write "about" the invasion, or at least to keep the reserves of writing history and to forego the passionate release of fiction. Faulkner, of course, has the greater imaginative power, invention, the last persistence of endeavour, while Young's writing is reflective. The sense of dedication and mission in Faulkner is probably less articulated intellectually, and for a certain kind of artist that is, of course, a condition of his strength.

The difference in the force of the two writers is, I think, quite beautifully illustrated by the difference of two towns in Mississippi—Oxford in the midst of slashed-over timber country, nervous, high-pitched; Woodville, the home of Judge McGehee, part of a more luxuriant growth, more at ease, closer to the civilization of the River, and assured to be part of its community.

"You stick to your blood, son," Hugh McGehee said; "there's

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<sup>36</sup>*Heaven Trees*, p. 203.

<sup>37</sup>*Feliciano*, p. 207.

a certain fierceness in blood that can bind you up with a long community of life."<sup>38</sup> And the idea of the community as of the force in life is integral to each loved character in Stark Young's narratives, so much so that the wonderful lines of Dante, that tell how God loved the soul before it was created, give Edward's father the words he needs, bidding good-bye to his son as he goes away to war: It's something to know that you were loved before you were born."<sup>39</sup> And again:

The children's voices now and then, the voices of people, things they have said, come into the mind and are gone; and you stand waiting, Hugh said to himself, waiting and looking on this quiet and sky as if nothing passed or was ever forgotten. A hush, a pause, and with the falling of a leaf, you you might hear the secrecy of your deep tenderness asking what you have done to bring between yourself and others the simplicity of affection and—in the old phrase—the communion of saints."<sup>40</sup>

The Great Dionysiac surge was here, too, with lightning and divinity and horror, the passion of Thrace and Sicily, and of the Christians, in a Negro baptism:

So much madness and beauty and passion, so much of the sun and the earth, of life in death and death in life there was as seemed to me never to have been before. The singing rose and fell. What voices and what wild harmonies! The voices swelled and floated over the water and sank again. It was Galilee; it was Africa, with endless spaces of land stretching away, deep sky, mystery, strange mad peoples.<sup>41</sup>

All Southern life partook of the ancient life-giving cultures, was indeed to be identified with the Mediterranean (and here Stark Young's intellectuality goes beyond Faulkner's); and the sense of sin, the dark trouble of the northern world, had come to trouble this life, too, which still had its other hell, as with the quadroom in *So Red the Rose*, the foreboding in her love, and "a low, ter-

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<sup>38</sup>*So Red the Rose*, New York: Scribner, 1934, p. 151.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>41</sup>*Heaven Trees*, p. 178.

rible, reckless cry."<sup>42</sup> But for such darkness there would have been only the Mediterranean passion and the Attic light.

From so many years of teaching there has continued the intimate and trusting and declarative note. In the writing, as perhaps in the best teaching, there is not so much the progress of thought as of the discovery of belief, of one's own beliefs, so to speak, what one was born with, what it was one was brought up to love. All else is the extension of that.

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<sup>42</sup>So *Red the Rose*, p. 143.

Robert Beloof

*Each Man to His Own Miracles*

Flails of blown snow  
Feather my head:  
Dust of the winter,  
Dust of the dead.

Black tree streaks  
Defy the white:  
Dark comets bursting  
Through this bleached night.

Calm houses hold  
Their silver load  
Kneeling dumbly  
By virgin road  
Where my dull feet  
Corrupt the crust,  
Negating now  
The vision-lust  
Which drove me forth  
For a lone walk  
To view smooth lawn  
And rounded rock  
Before a track  
Disrupt the sheen  
On bridal snows  
Beneath the moon,  
On hanging candles  
Burning cold,  
On marble statues  
Skilled winds mold.

There's the mark  
My foot has done  
To gnarl the vision  
For the next to come.

Such is the nature  
Of the undefiled,  
Though we be gentle,  
Though we be mild.

Marvin Mudrick

## THE PROFESSOR AND THE POET

Quincy Taylor was a New Englander, a Yale Ph.D. (winner in 1940 of the Jonathan Pratt Peabody Award for his dissertation on Emerson), Professor of English and Chairman of the Department for four years at a small but dignified California college, and not yet forty. The town he lived in was, like most coastal California towns, a resort, but dignified. The city elders held off heavy industry, kept the beaches clear of hot-dog stands, and, to supplement the gatherings of the "old" Californians (those who had come before the earthquake of '25), welcomed into their Spanish-tile-and-eucalyptus suburbs the families of retired Eastern plumbing manufacturers. The sober newspaper ("All the news without fear or favor") reported in tastefully brief items the police-court antics of the Mexican inhabitants of the lower end of town, found no space at all for accounts of local damage in the latest earthquake or drunk-and-disorderly charges against members of the old families, publicized the college ("Dr. Floyd Gudge, Professor of Practical Arts, is attending a Conference of Western States Practical Arts Teachers on improved methods of sharpening kitchen cutlery..."), and featured a drama-music-literature-art section on Sunday. A symphony orchestra visited three times a year, and, as in many California towns, there was a thriving community theater.

Taylor and the town got on well together. As an Easterner, he was qualified to patronize the rawness of California. He subscribed to the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, and the *Saturday Review* ("Otherwise I'd never known what's going on in the *civilized* world"). As a graceful speaker, he could preside over classrooms, auditoriums, theater audiences, and monthly meetings of the Department or the Country Club or the Community Theater Group with authority and satisfaction.

California attracts and rewards people with a flair. Taylor, with his ascetic figure, his politely sardonic smile, his agile step and platform manner, had a flair. At the college, students took "Taylor courses." To freshmen he brought Shakespeare. "In this scene I recall Katharine Cornell as Juliet, in a black cape that revealed a scarlet lining when she flung it open against the bare white backdrop." His Modern Poetry course was a sharing of the fabulous past. "I asked Robert Frost exactly what he meant by..." and "In those days Edna Millay looked..." Every year, at the beginning of the fall semester, he opened the College Poetry Readings with a performance of *The Waste Land*. Students, faculty, and townspeople filled the chairs and sat cross-legged on the floor of the Women's Clubroom watching as his hands gestured, his bright actor's eyes moved over them, his voice intoned: "Unreal City..." His special knowledge was, of course, 19th-century American literature. To his advanced class, he lectured with a manner of brilliant, mobile impromptu from meticulously handwritten notes; a former student, son of a prominent local merchant and now playing bit parts on television, had written of Taylor in a college-days reminiscence for the local paper: "When he spoke of *Moby Dick*, or *Hiawatha*, or the *Divinity School Address*, one felt that the slender man behind the desk had gradually risen several inches off the floor, suspended in his own severe exaltation." Taylor kept two copies, one at home and one in his desk at the college.

For the local theater group, he delighted capacity audiences and the local drama critic playing the college professor, the witty old codger, the dreamy intellectual in ten-year-old Broadway hits, with his own postures or a set of carefully learned ones. Two or three times a year he was given fifteen minutes over the local radio station (owned by the newspaper): he read poetry, or spoke of Emerson, Whittier, and Longfellow. He belonged to a liberal church of New England ancestry; once a year, at the request of the respectful pastor, he ascended black-robed, stern-eyed, and straight-faced to the pulpit, to deliver a "lay sermon" on the necessity of righteousness or the decay of gentility.

His tastes, he often said, were conservative. From the *New*

*Yorker* he neatly scissored out stories which parodied highbrow techniques, and, from the *Times* and the *Saturday Review*, articles which assailed what Taylor called "the brand-new criticism," he handed them around among his colleagues for their sharply observed amusement, and then took them home to paste the scraps of paper into a large scrapbook of other people's follies.

Still, he enjoyed celebrities, even avant-garde poets, in person. Sean O'Shaughnessy, founder of the new Orgiastic School of British poetry, sketched with Shelleyesque curls by Augustus John and praised by Miss Sitwell, had been only a rather distasteful name to him; but when he read in the *Times* that O'Shaughnessy was touring the country for lecture fees and would shortly be in California, he hastened to notify the Committee on Lectures and Drama. Telegrams were exchanged; and soon the *Press-Gazette* informed its readers that Sean O'Shaughnessy, celebrated young poet, would on a certain date be reading from his own poetry in the college auditorium.

So far, so good. Taylor read of O'Shaughnessy's arrival in Los Angeles to fulfill an engagement at one of the universities there. The first cloud appeared in the form of a phone call from the chairman of the Committee on Lectures and Drama. This gentleman had received troubling news from the metropolis. The poet, it seemed, drank; he refused to stop drinking; he had read his poems drunk; and he had hurled a glass of water, glass and all, at a face—it turned out to belong to a Professor Emeritus of Education—which he afterwards said looked too offensively stupid to be endured. Would the college please send somebody at once to pick up and pack off the poet?

Taylor volunteered to go. He was himself an almost invulnerable drinker, and he felt confident. He kissed his wife, told her he would be back the following afternoon, said a curt goodbye to his wife's son by her first marriage (the eight-year-old was overjoyed: Mama would let him come into bed with her in the morning while Quin, who forbade the practice, was gone), and set off by auto for Los Angeles.

Finding O'Shaughnessy was a job. Taylor had the name of his hotel, but he had not been there for more than twenty-four hours.



Nobody at the university knew where he was, and it was implied that at this point nobody cared to know. Taylor called a few literary lights of his acquaintance in the city, but none had seen him. Finally, the chairman of the University's English Department, phoned at his home for possible clues, recalled the name of a downtown bar that O'Shaughnessy had mentioned with special approval in the course of his reading.

He was there, seated on a bar stool, drinking, staring up at the television image high in a corner of the room. Taylor recognized him from a recent photo in the *Times*, very different from the Shelleyesque sketch. In person he was less prepossessing still. He was rather dumpy, even fat; his features had a potato-like grossness; his very coarse dark hair lay tangled on his head and brow; his clothes had obviously been worn for an indefinite period through all kinds of personal weather. Taylor paused to let his momentary distaste pass away, then walked over and took an adjacent stool.

He ordered a drink. O'Shaughnessy kept staring upward. "Mr. O'Shaughnessy," said Taylor, "I have come to claim you." O'Shaughnessy did not turn his head. "Think of all the money they make," he said. "First the movies, now this thing. Do you know anybody who could get me a job writing for them?" "I do know a script writer in town," said Taylor. O'Shaughnessy turned around; his eyes were small and dull. "What college are *you* from?" Taylor told him. "Could you take me to see this writer?" Taylor said he could. They left after Taylor had phoned the writer, mentioned the famous name, and made an engagement.

The writer was a round bald Englishman in a pink stucco cottage in North Hollywood. He was delighted to see the poet (whom Taylor had meanwhile persuaded to wash up and put on a less grimy jacket at the hotel), and he served the best Scotch. He talked about poets. He knew the British expatriates, at least well enough to tell amusing anecdotes about them. "Read the comics and trust in the Primate," said O'Shaughnessy. When he became rhetorical, his voice developed an impressive baritone richness. The writer was disconcerted: he was High Church himself. O'Shaughnessy wanted to know about Hollywood. The writer had anecdotes; so

did Taylor, who knew a number of minor Hollywood actors. "How do you meet the people who do the hiring?" asked O'Shaughnessy. Well, it was hard to break in and hard to stay in; luck had a lot to do with it; writing a successful play or novel helped; may I get you another drink? By two in the morning Taylor had managed to coax O'Shaughnessy to bed in his hotel and to fall asleep himself in a nearby room pondering and shaping the play he would write, a sort of variation on *Candida* . . .

Taylor found the ride back home exhilarating. He had not been able to prevent the poet's leisurely tour of bars in the vicinity, and they had not started till late in the afternoon; but O'Shaughnessy was comparatively rested, he brightened himself now and then with a draught from a bottle, and he told stories of London celebrities, of Osbert and Cyril and Uncle Tom the Deacon. Taylor took detailed mental notes. "O'Shaughnessy was saying it's common gossip in London . . ." He was still taking notes when they arrived at his home. He had O'Shaughnessy to himself that night for a late dinner Emily prepared, and for talk and drinks afterward. O'Shaughnessy was working on a close schedule, to make as much money, he explained, in as short a time as possible: tomorrow afternoon's reading at the college, the midnight Pullman to San Francisco for a reading there the following day. While Emily asked O'Shaughnessy about his family, Taylor phoned Gil Ross (Secretary of the Community Theater Group; old local family) and Alec Stillman (former Chairman of the Department; Yale Ph.D., 1931), tempted them with a few tidbits, and invited them to an after-dinner party on the following evening in honor of the poet, a farewell party. He rejoined Emily and O'Shaughnessy, who were talking about the wife and children left at home in London.

Morning at the college was pleasant. O'Shaughnessy was still safely in bed, and Emily had promised to keep him in the house until Taylor returned to pick him up for the reading. In the parking lot, he met one of his young instructors and mentioned casually that O'Shaughnessy was staying with him during the unfortunately brief visit. "Delightful fellow, no pretensions whatever," he said. At the office, Miss Brainerd responded with appropriate respect to the same information. Taylor, long convinced

that his secretary adored him, treated her always with special blandness: she was, as a matter of fact, hopelessly in love with a dapper Associate Professor of Sociology, who drove a convertible, wore sports clothes and dark glasses with corrected lenses, and taught his predominantly female students crime and punishment in the fall semester and marriage and the family in the spring; but Miss Brainerd regarded Taylor's complacency as kindness, and they got on well together. His mail, already on his desk, was agreeable: a complimentary copy of a new anthology of American literature, a letter from a Columbia graduate student asking for a job ("You are aware, I am sure," Taylor would answer, "that at this time uncertainty as to future enrollments . . ."). He reminded his classes of the event in the afternoon, and urbanely commanded them to attend. Between classes, he dropped in on Alec Stillman and told him more about O'Shaughnessy. Stillman, whom Taylor had succeeded as chairman, was a large solemn man; but he belonged to the same church, and they both attended the local Yale Club dinners—"oases in the Great Western Desert," Taylor had once remarked as toastmaster (laughter and applause).

The *Press-Gazette* had been notified while Taylor was at the office and when he got home the newspaper's human-interest reporter was sitting with Emily and O'Shaughnessy. The reporter was a large, self-assured middle-aged woman, whose self-assurance had grown out of a round of musical evenings at the homes of the best families ("Last evening Mrs. Malvina Trinkle threw open her lovely home in the foothills to a small gathering of friends and music-lovers, who were privileged to hear a concert by . . .") and catch-in-the-throat stories about children at school and at play ("Could you, if you were asked just like that, name all the forty-eight states? AND the territories? Little Billy Myers could, and did . . ."). Emily and O'Shaughnessy had apparently been drinking together: the glasses, the water, and the well-started bottle were still there. After the flurry of politenesses, Taylor listened. "Who are your favorite poets, Mr. O'Shaughnessy?" the reporter asked. "Shakespeare and Yeats, the poets of skin, blood, and lubricity." "Do you have any hobbies?" "Drinking." "What poem of your own is your favorite?" "They are all superb; but the best is

my latest, 'The Impotent Centaur'." "What is your ambition as a poet?" "To make a mint of money." "What do you think of our little city?" "I have seen very little of your little city, but it seems a hideous little picture-post-card of a city."

She left finally, baffled, with her information. Taylor was annoyed: he did not like his wife to be drinking in the afternoon, though he knew she often did while he was gone and her son was at school; she got drunk and maudlin, and at last cataleptic, very easily. She was now maudlin, telling O'Shaughnessy how mean her first husband had been to her, how big and empty Texas was with a mean no-account husband, how kind and polite Quin had been to her when she first knew him in Austin, where he'd been teaching then. Taylor told her to tidy herself up before the boy came home, and left with O'Shaughnessy to drive to the college.

O'Shaughnessy had—Taylor the amateur actor recognized—the actor's sense for audience. He was charming. He was creaseless and soiled, his doughy little figure barely dominated the lectern, but his voice was a wonderful, almost human instrument. He held and unified the crowd of students, faculty, and townspeople; he made them laugh with the confidence of being proximate to greatness. "When I was younger and the war was on, I went where all poets go when they're naughty—the BBC. I did my bit by playing Hamlet for the boys." He read poems by Yeats, Stephens, and Joyce, all in the same apocalyptic incantatory tone: "Great English poets, all Irish." He read from "Anna Livia Plurabelle." He read, in conclusion, a group of his own poems: "Ruddy Wedding," "The White Thighs of the Drover," "Umbilicus," "The Hair of the Grass," "The Impotent Centaur." Afterwards, there was prolonged applause, and many people gathered round to shake his hand, speak to him for a moment, collect his autograph. Taylor saw Gil Ross, red-faced with enthusiasm, press through to O'Shaughnessy's side, say something to him and shake his hand. Ross caught sight of Taylor and hurried over. "A great man!" he cried. "If we could only get him to play Hamlet for us!"

A great man; and given the opportunity to make his impression because Taylor had so tactfully kept him in hand. Taylor felt a comfortable gratification, an expansive altruism. He was not en-

vious of O'Shaughnessy: there were poets and there were the interpreters of poets, and he was content to be one of these—interpreter, friend, and unobtrusive supervisor of poets. Even Emily failed to dent his euphoria when she served dinner in sulky alcoholic silence and retired to the kitchen with her son. O'Shaughnessy had been pleased by the response to the reading and, drinking his Scotch and water while Taylor ate, talked exuberantly about new ideas for poems, about a verse-play commissioned by the BBC, about a poem he had begun just the other day in Los Angeles. He showed a piece of yellow paper covered with minute handwriting. Taylor knew that he had to have it. "Is that your only copy?" No, there was a second draft. "Might I have it as a memento?" "For the bed and the liquor," said O'Shaughnessy, handing it over. Taylor folded the paper and put it casually into his pocket.

By the time the Rosses arrived, Emily had made herself moderately presentable, and she even chatted for a moment with Jenny Ross. Gil Ross was cheerful with everyone, he introduced his wife to O'Shaughnessy and continued his congratulations of the afternoon. The Stillmans came, Isabel Stillman tall and frostily English-looking but with a gracious smile for the poet. For the first time O'Shaughnessy seemed somewhat uneasy; he sat down with finality on the sofa and went back to his drink, which he had carried from the dining-room. Emily, relapsed into sullenness, brought in a snack tray, set it on the sideboard, and took to the sofa also. Taylor made the drinks and passed them around.

Polite provocation of O'Shaughnessy had no effect. They drank. They turned to theater talk: first about the new English playwrights (no response); then about the "serious" Broadway hits, which the Rosses had seen on a recent trip to New York; then about the Community Theater's most recent production, in which Taylor had played the leading role. Isabel Stillman remarked on the finished quality of Quin's performance. Taylor, at Ross's insistence, did amusing imitations of the pansy director at work, the leading lady in a temper, the ex-Broadway ancient who enjoyed dressing down his juniors. The Rosses had taken minor parts, and both were animated about the pleasures of realizing oneself in

stagecraft, of "belonging to a whole." Taylor played a tape recording he had made of one of the scenes in rehearsal, his whimsical-philosopher scene; more reminiscence and compliments, except from Emily and O'Shaughnessy.

Ross, emboldened by all the talk, asked O'Shaughnessy about his acting on BBC, and was answered in monosyllables, mostly indistinct. "There's nothing like that over here," said Ross, "nothing at all." "The English tolerate at least a token display of culture," said Taylor. "We have heard fine reports about the Third Program," said Stillman. "It's a dirty, dead and rotten country," said O'Shaughnessy; "no money, no corpuscles, all starched front and scraggy behind." Isabel Stillman began to look professionally British, and Jenny Ross's social smile lost some of its voltage. Taylor said that perhaps with the infusion of new blood from Ireland England could be saved. Emily, who had been drinking without comment, looked up long enough to say that Quin, damn him, thought he could always smooth things over. "Thank you, my dear," said Taylor, who felt like Congreve in a constellation of lively drinking company. Emily added, "Smooth as a baby's ass."

They played charades. The Stillmans did *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the Rosses *You Can't Take It With You*, and Taylor (Emily refused) *The Way of the World*. O'Shaughnessy stood up, pounded his chest with both fists, rolled with hunched shoulders and bowed arms to the window, and jumped to hang by his hands from the ledge above it: he swung there for a moment, grunting experimentally at various pitches. "Tarzan," he announced at last in a creditably anthropoid voice, "and the Apes," leaped at a nearby cord, and brought down a large Venetian blind and himself with his own dull thump and a reverberating clatter of thin metal. He crawled on all fours to the middle of the room, turned a neat circle on his hands so that each quarter might observe the seat of his trousers, rose, brushed off his hands lightly on the shiny seat, and returned to the sofa.

Emily was almost inert beside him; even Taylor felt unusually warm and good-humored. O'Shaughnessy seemed now to be settling into a portentous sulk, and the others, relaxed and rosy,

Emily with damp drowsy eyes, watched him in furtive compassion. "My wife and kids left back there, that hole of a flat, so I can earn a miserable bit for them over here, all alone, all of us." Tears started in his eyes. Suddenly his head was in Emily's lap and he was sobbing noisily; Emily sat bolt upright wide-eyed, then scandalized as a hand rose from the crumpled body and fitted itself to the jut of her bodice, then crying, "Quin, make him stop!" Taylor was himself surprised at the depth of his sympathy: "Don't be silly," he said sharply, "he's just lonely." "Quin!" she cried helplessly. "Let him alone," came the sad muffled voice from below, "yield to the voice of the womb, be the huge engrossing earth-mother." The spectators stared, trying to collect themselves into a suitable attitude. Emily pushed the hand down. "Let me tell you something about my husband," she said with heavy deliberateness, "he's no man out of bed or in." "Emily has her own notions of virility," said Taylor, "which are I am sure of no interest to anyone else."

O'Shaughnessy bethought himself of something, stirred, rose, moved irresolutely toward the hall unbuttoning himself, did not manage to avoid a slight mishap on the living-room carpet, but kept going. Jenny Ross was propelled out of her chair shrieking: she ran past him into the bedroom, emerged holding her husband's coat and violently putting on her own, and pulled Ross toward the door. A remote hostess-bell apparently began ringing in Emily's brain; she got up and tried vaguely to intercept them: "Must you go, Jenny?" she asked. "Get away from me!" Jenny screamed, and dragged her husband with her out into the night. Isabel Stillman had decided to be superciliously amused, but Stillman was shocked into a goggle-eyed sobriety; after an exchange of courtesies with Emily and with Taylor, who was savoring his own imperturbable courtliness to the very door, they departed.

O'Shaughnessy had come back and sat down to somebody's unfinished drink. "I'm going to bed," said Emily. "I'll join you after I take our guest to the train," said Taylor amiably. "You can go to hell," she said, leaving.

There was very little time, and Taylor brought in the volumes of O'Shaughnessy's poems he had bought earlier in the day. O'Shaughnessy autographed all of them: To Emily and Quin,

With love, From Sean. The volumes would grace, carelessly, a table in the living-room and his desk in the Department office. "Everything passes, art remains," said Taylor, driving O'Shaughnessy to the station. "We don't have to worry, do we," said O'Shaughnessy, "as long as we have people like you on our side." "Thank you," said Taylor, feeling moisture in his eyes. "Where will I get my liquor in San Francisco?" said O'Shaughnessy.

When Taylor returned to the house, he lingered for several minutes over the books, reading each inscription closely, observing the peculiarities of the handwriting, the bold initial T, the imperial S of the signature. He went into the bedroom at last. Emily was asleep and snoring. About to take off his suitcoat, he remembered. He took the piece of yellow paper out of his pocket and read carefully as much of the tiny scrawl as he could decipher. He replaced it reverently in the pocket and hung up the coat. He undressed and slipped into bed beside her. He thought of the poet at bay, and began to weep.



Chris Bjerknes

*November*

A wish of ducks, winged whistling south as crying  
water bumps across the ankles of thin legged reeds,  
the wind across the sands gnawing as hounds  
and time as the flowers fold,  
light in a sun dance on bare boughs  
where a spear of birds travel at the hour of dawn  
lump into the water, where now the phlegm  
from a rifle coughs, a drake unhinged from the air  
plunged down slipping upon its own shadow,  
where the cold sound of a hound barks  
in a ritual moves across, stepping on his own breath,  
now where the lone dove coiling down the loft  
of winds weirdly wandering, like Rachel muttering  
her cliché of grief, until the black flak of another  
volley claws into the hair of the wind—and grips  
her feathers in a rude fist and slams her down  
into the drowsy stream, as the brown clay vase of dawn  
fills to the brim with blood spills over into light and  
river, now where impatient the hunter stuffs the limp drake  
and dove into a bamboo grave,  
the soft chatter of the chill water, when wild geese  
slip coldly through the autumn out of range, as the free  
are wont.

Harry Modean Campbell

## A Revaluation of

ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS'

*The Time of Man* and *The Great Meadow*

Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man* and *The Great Meadow* seem especially worthy of revaluation in these times because the power of the human spirit, the theme of all her work, is in these novels expressed in a manner that approaches the epic. Each book indeed is a kind of *Odyssey* of the human spirit—the wanderings of Ellen and Jasper and their children in *The Time of Man* and of Diony, Berk and their company in *The Great Meadow* exhibit with endurance and heroism comparable to that of Ulysses, and in the same noble spirit, although the modern wanderers (except for a little philosophy learned from her father by Diony) are uneducated country folk. And the refreshing quality in Miss Roberts' modern variants of the *Odyssey* is that she gives no ironic parody to indicate modern degeneracy, after the fashion of Joyce, Pound, and Eliot; instead, the comparison is suggested by the beautiful poetic language in which the tales are told, the elemental vigor and heroism of the characters, the emphasis on their closeness to the Earth-Mother, the Goddess Terra, from contact with whom their vigor is derived and their simple dignity enhanced even against a vast cosmic background. Miss Roberts' unpublished notes indicate that the analogy suggested here was part of her conscious aim. Of *The Time of Man* she says:

It was, I think, in the summer of 1919 that I began to think of the wandering tenant farmer of our region as offering a symbol for an *Odyssey* of Man as wanderer buffeted about by the fates and the weathers.

Of *The Great Meadow*:

It was a mythical country into which they went. . . . Their farewells in Virginia were known to be final or epic farewells.

But "mythical" means simply poetic, never exaggerated. The characters are never sentimentalized or made faultless. Though the realism is heightened poetically, these characters appear as men of flesh and blood with strong senses and a passionate love of life, but a life in which spirit is just as real as flesh—spirit in them, as one of Miss Roberts' characters says, "crying out of flesh," at times with extreme weariness but more often with joy of living—always indeed, in joy or sorrow, with a strong will to live.

The general structural organization of these books may be said to be somewhat in the nature of a pageant. In fact, Miss Roberts frequently refers to a series of scenes as a pageant. Since the main characters—Ellen in *The Time of Man* and Diony in *The Great Meadow*—like their author, are Berkeleyans, it is to be expected that life would appear to them as a kind of spiritual drama (a moving pageant) deriving its substance (since Spirit is the eternal substance) from the mind of God. And of course these characters, through whose points of view in the main the stories are conveyed to us, are not spectators but the most important actors in the drama, being, from the Berkeleyan standpoint, actors quite as much in their extensive and intricate reflections as in their physical actions. Because of the subtle and intense blending of philosophy and religion with point of view in these novels, the reader's pleasure is enhanced by a double pageant: (1) the simple but very dramatic life in which the heroines are involved, and (2) the rich psychological and spiritual drama of their reflections on this life.

The pageant of life in *The Time of Man* appears as a series of dramatic scenes, some idyllic and some tragic, the cumulative effect of which is very powerful even though there is no definite climatic organization in the tradition of the well-made novel. That the whole story is very carefully planned, however, is clear in the work itself and in her very explicit notes, which deserve quotation here:

It did not seem much longer than necessary as I contemplated it when I made it. The whole is not a plotted story in any artificial sense, though I follow form—a musical form, perhaps, a felt form, and in that view of it I and II form a sort of overture, containing, as they do, all of it in the end.

All the incidents have not been chosen for the latter half of it, but there is to be no 'return' except in a sense of art—no 'return' in the externals of circumstance. The most that I care to do is to present the sweet soil, the dirt of the ground, black earth, bitter and foul of odor, full of worms, full of decay which is change, not evil—black earth, ground, soil . . . and the other one, white sun, light . . . these two forever mingled and mystically braided together in life form, all life, which is Ellen . . . Life is a slender thread running like a ripple through the brown crust of the earth.

Life or spirit, then, as concentrated in, symbolized by, Ellen, is the main concern, but this symbolism, through Ellen as the symbol, is made as solid and rich as the "sweet soil" and as clear as the "white sun." The story, therefore, is focused on (presented through) Ellen's consciousness, and the external events and other characters, though interesting in themselves, remain subordinated to her. These events and characters, though subordinated, are perfectly clear, but they derive their clarity, and their dramatic quality is intensified, from their being presented to us through the point of view of one so intensely alive as she. The "musical form," then, follows the gradual maturing of Ellen's personality (her spirit), the "overture" being the presentation of her childhood through adolescence, and the later "return" her reflections on this early life as her own children are growing up.

It is in this way that content and form (theme and embodiment of theme) are so closely welded together in the work of Miss Roberts, and never in any of her other books quite so much as in *The Time of Man*. The vitality of Ellen's spirit of course is that of Miss Roberts herself. Miss Roberts was born and as a child lived in poverty almost as oppressive as Ellen's, and overcame this and many later difficulties with the same kind of spiritual self-assertion. Ellen's shouting her joy in living to the hills—her "I am Ellen!"—and her recovery from sorrow by this strong awareness of the mystery and glory of self-identity—all this, if we may believe those who knew Miss Roberts, was a reflection of a similar exultant and unconquerable spirit which made her continue to write beautiful and important fiction and verse as long as she lived, although she was in constant pain from an incurable disease dur-

ing the last fifteen years of her life. But this closeness to her characters never means, as it too often means in the work of Thomas Wolfe, an uncritical autobiographical absorption into the content of the story. As she says again in her notes for *The Time of Man*:

Through an identify of myself with the actors, goes still and always a condition of aesthetic detachment, aware and unaware—at once within the action, and aware of the tragedy and beauty of all-enclosing form.

Miss Roberts' skill in handling point of view is exhibited from the very beginning of the book. Ellen's father, having broken away from the caravan of nomadic country folk, has settled down to work for a farmer; Ellen, separated from her closest friend, Tessie, thinks that her father has stopped for only a short while, and reflects thus: "She would have something to tell Tessie when her father's wagon overtook the others. She recited in her mind the story of the adventure as she would tell it." Since Ellen is eager to interest Tessie, this recital is very naturally and dramatically given in Ellen's own language, including bits of imagined conversation between her and Tessie. In this way the necessary exposition for the situation at the beginning of the story is given. Similarly, all the other exposition in the story comes economically and naturally through conversation or through Ellen's thoughts, which are dramatized by being presented usually in her language interspersed with bits of remembered conversation. Ellen thinks of what has happened, sometimes looks forward to what will come (or to what she hopes will come). As Miss Roberts says in her notes, this story "could never be an analysis of society or of a social stratum because it keeps starkly within one consciousness, and that one being not of an analytical nature or a 'conscious' consciousness. There is a tryst here, a bargain, between two, and two only, and these two are Ellen and Life." But Miss Roberts certainly does not make a fetish of the limited point of view and does not hesitate to assist the character's thoughts with omniscient-author explanations when they are necessary for clarity. The omniscient-author explanations, however, are limited to a presentation of psychological processes which the character is experiencing but

could not express in her own words or is perhaps unaware of. In other words, such explanations are most frequently a rendering of the poeticized essence of Ellen's thoughts, in harmony with the poetic realism that is the tone of the whole story.

Thoughts of certain parts of the past appear repeatedly in Ellen's memory, but the method is never repetitive because they are always recalled under different circumstances, which throw new light on the events themselves and on the development of Ellen's spirit. In fact, the double drama mentioned earlier is for two reasons especially impressive in these scenes unfolding new and significant details that have occurred but are revealed only in the recollection: (1) the dramatic interest of the events themselves is enhanced by this gradual revelation, and (2) the mental drama of Ellen's reactions to an event at the time of its occurrence may be enhanced by its being later recalled in her suffering mind as identical with some crisis in her own life. Such an event is the suicide of Ellen's neighbor, Miss Cassie MacMurtrie, when she became aware of her husband's infidelity. When the terrible event occurs, we are not given many details; the main point is that when at the coroner's inquest Ellen is asked whether she could give any reason for the suicide, her truthful answer in the negative is dictated by her deep love for Jonas, her first serious sweetheart.

Jonas enveloped her mind stirring in the farthest corners of her being and she could not think why one would quit life. A great will to live surged up in her, including the entire assembly . . . Only life was comprehensible and actual, present. She was herself life. It went with her wherever she went, holding its abode in her being. She was alive, she was alive.

Then after Jonas jilts her and she has worried until she hates him passionately enough if he were present to kill him (with the butcher knife which she is using to cut meat for supper),

a great strength came to her that made her hands tremble under their grip. Then words that were printed into her memory long ago began to run forward, and this hour lost its identity before the force of another, long past, until she swam back into the past as if she were an apparition, without presence of its own. The voices spoke aloud, voices of men, filling the room with their terror, speaking sharply, speaking with authority or fright.

"... how to get 'er down ..."

"Cut the rope ..."

"No, don't cut no rope. She might be still a-liven."

"Bring up that lamp, Ellen."

Then follows a much fuller account of the discovery of Miss Cassie's body than was given at the time when the suicide occurred, bits of conversation like the above and Ellen's agonized attempt "to free herself of the specters, to push aside the old event and disentangle her own" appearing alternately; the speakers (as often in Miss Roberts' impressionistic rendering of crucial scenes) are not identified, apparently to increase the dramatic concentration on the center of interest, which here is Ellen's agonized identification of her own suffering with Miss Cassie's tragedy:

Jonas had been in her thought too long so that her very breath had grown up around him. He was even then tearing a pain through her breast. She saw even more vividly the face on the floor, two men leaning over it, one preparing it for life and the other for death; and then the coroner, "Yes, she tied the rope herself, that's plain" . . . . She was leaning over Miss Cassie as she lay on the floor—Ellen and Miss Cassie and no other. She leaned over the dead face until she was merged with its likeness, looking into the bulging eyes, the blackened mouth, and the fallen jaw. She went down the stairs and out the door of the house . . . . She was still merged with the face . . . .

Ellen's memory is at times aided by her imagination so that she may recall portions of the past which, though they occurred, she has never actually experienced. Her mother has told her so often of her six little brothers and sisters, all dead before she was born, that at several points in the story she recalls them, mentioning their names as if she had known and loved each one individually. She lives in imagined memory most intimately with their tragically brief lives toward the end of the book as, with her own children about her (after the death of one of them and her father), she recalls her own life compounded (according to the human lot) of joy and sorrow.

Or hearing Hen's foxhorn, a hoarse note without music, a rough throaty call, she would wonder that the swift cry of a horn had once gone into her like a glad spear, and she

would penetrate her own history, into memories long habitually forgotten. It had seemed forever that she had travelled up and down roads, having no claim upon the fields but that which was snatched as she passed. Back of that somewhere in a dim darkened dream like a prenatal vision, she saw a house under some nut trees, a place where she lived, but as clearly seen as this she could see her brother Davie and the others, the more shadowy forms of the older children although all of them were dead before she was born. So that this house with the odor about it of nut shells was all imbedded now in the one dream that extended bedimmed into some region where it merged with Nellie's memories. Life began somewhere on the roads, traveling after the wagons where she had claim all upon the land and no claim, all at once, and where what she knew of the world and what she wanted of it sparkled and glittered and ran forward quickly as if it would always find something better.

All of Ellen's reflections upon the past help to unify the story; this one especially since toward the end of the book it gives a retrospective summary of her life and emphasizes once more the theme of the story, life, now as when she was a child, "running forward quickly as if it would always find something better." Remembrance of things past here is never an escape but an incentive to go forward.

And so at the end of the book as at the beginning, the wanderers are on the road seeking something better. After Jasper has been cruelly beaten by the hooded group of men, he, Ellen, and the children pack all their belongings that they can get on the wagon, leave the rest behind, and drive down the road, not knowing their destination. Some of the children talk about the mystery and beauty of the stars on this clear night, and Dick, the studious one, tells them that they can learn all about this subject and everything else, as he intends to do, in books. Dick is the child in whom, as we have learned earlier, Ellen "felt her own being . . . pushed outward the great over-lying barrier, and enveloping dark." Ellen's feeling toward Dick, indeed, may be taken as a symbol of the courage of this whole family facing what at best for them could be only a formidable unknown. And, just as truly, the universal appeal of this whole book (and almost all Miss Roberts' other work) should be its artistic availability as a symbol of the courage which



enables most of the human race unceasingly to "push outward against the great over-lying barrier, the enveloping dark."

\* \* \* \* \*

In *The Great Meadow* as in *The Time of Man* the great pageant of life is rendered dramatically through the consciousness of the heroine. The material in *The Great Meadow* could have been exploited, after the fashion of almost all historical novels, for a great deal of physical action. The setting of the story is just prior to and during the American Revolution, and it deals with the early settlement of Kentucky and brings in historical characters like Boone, Logan, Harrod, Major George Rogers Clark, and others. All this material is used mainly to throw light on the spiritual development of the heroine Diony, with the physical action usually presented in swift, impressionistic sketches, but the concentration on Diony is not so great as that on Ellen (in *The Time of Man*), because the minor characters in *The Great Meadow* contribute more to the great theme of the primacy of man's spirit than do those in the earlier book. Diony's husbands, Berk Jarvis and Evan Muir, are men of a heroic mould no less great than of the great historical characters; and Diony's mother-in-law, Elvira, belongs among the truly great pioneer women. The fictional characters, indeed, are hardly to be distinguished from the historical ones because they are all true to the spirit of that great age and equally vivid as Miss Roberts portrays them. Of the compelling origins of this book she says in her unpublished notes:

I saw these people coming over the Trace, some of them coming early when there were hundreds of miles and scarcely broken forests to be passed. The drama was brief but it was full and picturesque. I thought it would be an excellent labor if one might gather all these threads, these elements, into one strand, if one might draw these strains into one person and bring this person over the Trace and through the Gateway in one symbolic journey. The names of the persons I have projected were not written on the census taken at Fort Harrod in 1777 although I placed them there, as present at the time. They were the spiritual consummation of all who came the way they came. . . .

Except for a brief section entitled "An Interval" to tell of those who lived at Ford Farrod when Diony and Berk arrived there, all this wealth of background material never delays the swift progress of the story. In this book, even more than in *The Time of Man*, may be noted the swift and inexorable flowing of time. The skill, for example, with which Miss Roberts lets one scene merge into another (as an indication of fleeting time) is especially well illustrated in a description of life at the fort. Diony has been wishing to see a beautiful river a few miles to the north of the fort, but the trip is too dangerous while hostile Indians are around.

Her pleasure of a river could wait. She knew herself to be the beginning of a new world. All about her were beginnings. The beginnings of fields took form as the trees were cleared away and the canelands plowed, and the beginnings of roads appeared where a man made a trace by walking to a stream, another following and another, and added to these the footmarks of dogs and horses. She learned to fashion garments of buckskin for a man, working softness into the stiff hide and sewing the seams together with a leather strip of elkskin. Often there was dancing in the stockade. A fiddler would fling out a reel or a jig and the young women would gather in the dusk. Then the fiddler would call for dancers and the men would come, not caring whether they did or not, but dancing nevertheless. Then there were gay ironic curses, compounded of danger and scarcity and the need a man has for revel . . . . There was dancing every night while the fiddler stayed there.

The next week a preacher came, one who had visited the fort at Boonesborough and preached there. He seized upon the rhythm that swayed the fort in dancing and turned it to the uses of religion and he called for repentance, saying that wickedness was rife there. Then there was singing where there had been dancing, and there was a hearty flowing of tears . . . .

Besides the swift passing of time, indicated especially in the movement from dancing to religion, the multifariousness and great importance of this frontier life are caught up in this simple summary passage, the summary, as always in Miss Roberts' writing, being composed, not of general statements, but of sharp, concrete details (even to the exact manner of making a new road). As a part

of all this life, Diony "knew herself to be the beginning of a new world," and so, the implication is, did all the others there. And how did they go about fulfilling this great destiny? Most American historical novels would have it mainly a matter of grand marches and thrilling Indian fights. And of course *The Great Meadow* contains Indian fights because these were a part of the reality—but a negative and destructive part. The positive beginnings of this new world were made, as the next few sentences indicate so vividly, in the simple, everyday activities of the fort. And of equal importance with this simple but heroic labor (coming in the same paragraph) is the recreation of gay music and dancing, the rhythm of which merges, by the preacher's skillful maneuvering, into the emotional outburst of a religious revival. There is, however, none of the easy satire which in much modern fiction has been directed at such revivals; Miss Roberts knows that evangelical religion has been a very important and on the whole constructive force in the new world.

The above typical passage has, then, indicated that the swift passing of time in Miss Roberts' work is not the tyranny of meaningless time in a Godless world. For her and her characters there is, in spite of the pressure of time, a sense of significant achievement—a structure erected on the foundation of the ever present past, as Diony realized on her wedding day when she was leaving her parents (never to see or hear from them again, as she knew) to go with Berk over the mountains and into the distant wilderness:

Suddenly, in the tinkling of the bells [on the horses], she knew herself as the daughter of many, going back through Polly Brook through the Shenandoah Valley and the Pennsylvania clearings and roadways to England, Methodists and Quakers, small farmers and weavers, going back through Thomas Hall to tidewater farmers and owners of land. In herself then an infinity of hopes welled up, vague desires and holy passions for some better place, infinite regrets and rendering farewells mingled and lost in the blended inner tinkle and clatter. These remembrances were put into her own flesh as a passion, as if she remembered all her origins, and remembered every sensation her forebears had known, and in the front of all this mass arose her present need for Berk and her wish to move all the past outward now in conjunction with him.

The merging of the past, present, and future is skillfully combined in this passage with the merging of the outer physical world and the inner world of the spirit—this latter in the beautiful symbolism of the tinkling bells blended with the “inner tinkle and clatter.”

Miss Roberts frequently attains the effect of urgent time in her narrative technique by giving swift and piercing glimpses with very little continuous display of a constituted scene, but at crucial points in the story she can get the same effect by dramatically expanding the individual scene. Consider, for example, the development of the scene in which Diony and Elvira are attacked by two Indians, Elvira being killed and Diony critically wounded. Since this scene is one of the most important in the book (most of the rest of the story—especially Berk’s long journey to get revenge—growing out of it), Miss Roberts builds up to it with considerable detail and then describes at length the heroic struggle of the two women to keep the Indians out of the hut. The dramatic physical action is handled with great skill and then is succeeded (as one would expect of a convinced Berkeleyan and an artist) immediately without a change of paragraph by a dramatic description of Diony’s consciousness just before she fades into unconsciousness from the blow by the Indian’s hatchet:

Then Diony saw the hatchet that leaped over her own head, and a great blow fell as a stiffness that tightened through her being and shut pain out . . . . She dreamed of her home in Virginia, of sitting beside Betty in the half-light under the high window, drawing threads of linen off the distaff to the whirr of the great wheel . . . . There was sweetness and security in the dark room, a great rain falling outside and crashing over the dog alley. Then she waked a little out of the pain that throbbed over her and stiffened her head to a tight sheaf that crushed her thought. . . . A light down floated over the dark of her understanding and blew without consequence across a great dark space, and she caught at the first fleck of it which signified that she must close the door. A second lighter thistledown drifted across the dark . . . . which informed her that Elvira was dead, that she lay scalped on the floor . . . . she tried once again to close her will about the necessity to live, to arise and close the door, but she was enveloped in greater darkness and her

pain turned back upon some inner and mightier frame, which had been as yet untouched and untested, and asked it again for some kindlier sign, some final explanation.

Psychologically this passage renders with great effectiveness the twilight zone (fantasy punctuated with brief glimpses of reality) of a consciousness fading out after a severe wound; but it also goes far deeper than this: the Berkeleyan philosophy and religion (as the "inner and mightier frame") are made to appear the inevitable and solid refuge after the preliminary escape into childhood memories. Techniques and theme are completely merged, and the reader is not aware of the author, but of the immediate and moving drama, the mental and spiritual quite as cogent as the physical.

Another device which Miss Roberts uses to dramatize the individual scene is a kind of conversational impressionism. Summary scenes often end in a series of short sentences that are completely snatches of conversation, in which the speakers are not identified. The swift impressionistic effect remains, since in the pressure of time there is no pause to identify the speakers, but the scene has been sharply dramatized by the conversation. Such a conversational ending is analogous to the ending of a section of a musical composition with a swift movement of the notes, each small group related to, partly repeating, those coming before, and yet advancing the theme always with variations—somewhat like the movement of waves coming into the shore—overlapping, sometimes seeming to retreat, and yet moving forward gracefully and inevitably to the pause at the end of the movement. Such a technique is well illustrated in the following passage, in which the marriage of Berk and Diony by a Methodist minister, when the Virginia law requires a Church of England minister, is sharply criticized by some of the guests before the bridal couple leave for the wilderness:

"It's only Tories would hold what Stafford holds," a voice whispered.

"If any doubt has come to trouble any man in Albemarle, we'll go away now, this hour," Berk said. "Married we are and married we'll go away from here. We won't have to prove the law of the Tories against we get in the wilderness."

"Hit's a wilderness marriage. Let be." One or two spoke.

"Married for the wilderness."

"Don't trouble their souls with doubt."

"It's a miracle; the old law come back."

"Married fit for the wilderness."

"Without law, but no matter."

"Quiet! A new day. No matter."

"Amen, amen, amen."

Miss Roberts seems to be referring to this impressionistic-conversational technique and indicating the exalted nature of its conception when she writes in an isolated note on *The Great Meadow* of her desire "To find the Greek inevitables in nature all around us, whatever the station of life presented. Hence the chorus of voices crying from among the 'gossips'."

Diony, like Ellen, often seems to see herself as if from an outside point, sometimes by the unaided projection of her imagination, at other times with her imagination assisted by another's report, as when, a few months after the Indian attack that was fatal to Elvira and almost to her, she "heard report of herself by the mouth of Lawrence," one of the settlers, who had heard it while on a journey among the Indians:

Two white squaws, herself one of them, were named over and over. She was a white squaw among the Long Knives, then. She saw herself from the distance, a long dim vista reaching down from Ohio. She saw a white squaw, a strong young woman with rich life in her, a faint red under her sunburnt cheeks, her linsey dress casting a dull shadow in the dim cabin. She, the white squaw, walked over the earth floor and went into the deeper shadows beside the fireplace.

Diony, like Ellen, though very modest, is aware of her own beauty and vitality, and is momentarily pleased that the Indians should find her attractive—so pleased that she adopts the Indians' point of view in this vision and sees herself as a white squaw. But the tragic memory is quickly resumed as the "white squaw" "walked over the earth floor and went into the deeper shadows beside the fireplace" in the hut where the terrible event occurred, and the brief vision is swiftly ended, the next scene shifting forward to the resumption of her work in the fort after the healing of her wound.

In portraying the psychology of Diony, Miss Roberts uses one method which she does not use in presenting Ellen: in her grief for Berk, who has been absent almost two years on his mission to kill Indians, and whom everybody but herself believes to be dead, Diony still clings to a desperate hope and talks to Berk as if he were present and another Berk had left her:

"He forgot me when the year was only half done," she said, addressing Berk, asking for redress. "He went off after revenge, to kill Indians to satisfy the death of his mother." She drew out the thread and wound it on the spindle, her presence turned toward Berk as if she would still recount to him all that concerned herself. "He forgot our child I had here in the wilderness." Berk was bade to witness Berk, to blame and despise. She flung out one sobbing cry for this and another to follow it when she realized the crookedness of her thought, wailing then without reason, but the tears and the cries of the child stopped her.

In this outburst of grief associated with the delusion of the two Berks, Diony shows a properly human emotion that does not in the least detract from the heroism of her character. Boone himself is said to have wept on occasion, as no doubt on that recorded in real life in his diary, from which Miss Roberts quotes in her notes as follows: "My footsteps have often been marked with blood—lost two darling sons and a brother [killed by the Indians] . . . Many dark and sleepless nights have I been . . . separated from the cheerful society of men . . . an instrument ordained to settle the wilderness." In fact, these characters (both fictional and historic), though presented most convincingly, are so heroic and independent that the primacy of spirit in them becomes almost a transcendental self-reliance instead of Christian faith in an all-provident God. Though due allegiance is acknowledged here and there to Berkeley's "great Mover and Author of Nature"—the supreme mind-substance—yet Boone (especially) takes on something of a nature of a demi-god, who brings order out of chaos in nature. "Boone the leader," as Miss Roberts says in her notes, "to take us through Chaos," and in her unfinished poem that was to be called "Daniel Boone and the Long Hunters," Boone achieves god-like feats:

At last he dug the Mammoth Cave.  
 He spaded out the rock and the air,  
 And he said now let it be dark  
 And it was so in there.

And he divided the dark in two  
 And the bright half he called light—  
 That's where we get night and day.  
 The bright half he called light.

Diony, too, though always feeling her inferiority to Boone, longs as a child (like the Berkeleyan God) to create rivers by thinking of them, and in a sense does so by her heroic and spiritual life amid the rivers and canelands of pioneer Kentucky. Diony from an early age felt "a sense of grandeur" in the great name given her; she

knew what name she bore, knew that Dione was a great goddess, taking rank with Rhea, and that she was the mother of Venus by Jupiter . . . She knew that Dione was one of the Titan sisters, the Titans being earth-men, children of Uranus and Terra. She had a scattered account of this as it came from between her father's ragged teeth as he bit at his quid and spat into the ashes . . . Her brothers called her Diny, and they were indeed earth-men, delving in the soil to make it yield bread and ridding the fields of stumps, plowing and burning the brush.

Though Diony and Ellen are always humble and modest enough, the emphasis in portraying them seems to be shifted toward exalting their spiritual independence—(in Diony especially) almost their transcendental semi-divinity. There is no mention of dependence on Christ in either book: Ellen in a crisis turns to a stronger realization of her self-identity—"I am Ellen"; Diony in her supreme crisis turns deep within herself to "some inner and mightier frame . . . as yet untouched and untested," which seems more like Emersonian self-reliance (though Berkeley, not Emerson, is the philosophical source) than Christian prayer.

In *The Great Meadow*, of course, there are several references to Berkeley's "great Mover and Author of Nature," but this God is more Aristotelian than Christian—which brings up another point about the nature of the religion indicated in these books.



Thomas Hall, Diony's father, speaks of the pagan gods and the Berkeleyan "great Mover" as if both were real:

He talked of Rhea who, he said, signified succession and who was the mother of six gods: Jupiter, Vesta, Neptune, Ceres, Juno, and Pluto; and these took their fitting places in the heavens or in the earth or in the underworld of the ground. The great Mover and Author of Nature, he said, makes himself plain continually to the eyes of mankind through these visible signs . . . .

What, then, is the explanation of this somewhat puzzling combination of purely pagan gods and Berkeley's Great Mover, who is part Christian and part Aristotelian, and the pagan tendency toward pantheism—both in a kind of mystical glorification of Mother-Earth and in the semi-transcendental self-reliance of the main characters? The Christian God, to be sure, is not denied: these characters attend religious revivals and other services in churches that are in the Protestant Evangelical tradition. Extra-Christian tendencies seem to exist, rather contradictorily, along with a simple belief in Christian doctrine as preached in the frontier Protestant churches of that period. Since even professional philosophers are not always consistent in their systems, the appearance of such contradictory beliefs in simple characters like those of Miss Roberts is certainly not unrealistic. These characters, furthermore, were the spiritual descendants of widely varying types of colonial Americans, as she indicates in her unpublished papers by tracing the interconnections among the characters in all her books in one big genealogical table and by the following note:

Tidewater gentry, scholarship, pagan lore, English communicants and Catholics, wealth and ease, family pride, there are met by sturdy races of tradesmen and farmers, Methodists—most despised sect of the century—Puritanic, Quaker, provident, holy, and aggressive, of great bodily vigor and a sturdy beauty . . . . These elements gathered into the parents of this woman, Diony.

And certainly in Miss Roberts' characters various, and even at times contradictory, types of belief have been welded together at white heat in the intense vitality of their personalities, a re-

flection of the intense vitality, and an embodiment of the artistic triumph, of their author. In fact, Miss Roberts' artistic achievement, especially in the two books here considered, is the welding together of poetry and realism, technique and theme—psychology, philosophy, and religion not compartmentalized as is customary in this skeptical age but completely unified as they are rendered in the intense consciousness of the heroines. Narrative technique alternates between panoramic, impressionistic sketches (to indicate the swift flowing of time) and the detailed dramatic development of crucial scenes—both presented again mainly from the point of view of the heroine, now very accurately in her own delightful, archaic rural idiom, again as the poetized essence of her thoughts.

In conclusion, it seems well to turn once more to Miss Roberts' unpublished papers. The following undated fragment of a letter to some friend (unnamed) indicates a clear understanding of the great tradition in which she worked and of her lasting success in *The Time of Man* as an artist in her own right within that tradition:

Now my masters are Hardy, Shakespeare, Synge, Beethoven—symphonies—Dickinson, Hopkins. I am still a musician deeply along with whatever else I am. *The Time of Man* is a symphony brought into words, for I believe that it is, whatever its failings, complete in itself. At its roots, its inception, it might have taken musical form.

And finally another of her notes on the sources of *The Great Meadow*:

I used to sit near by grandmother to hear her tell of the wonders of her youth and to hear her thrust memory back into the memories of her father and mother, back through the Wilderness by way of the Trace . . .

Upon this inheritance the odors of old centuries continually blow out of old books to join what is kept treasured thus within, what is identical with the breath of life. These confirmations of things held in family memory give a pleasurable sense of one's own validity, as if, having known by the way of the senses, one knew again by the way of the summaries of human experience that are on written pages. Thus one projects himself into more than one century and

knows what it is to be alive in a reach and breadth of existence that transcends three score years and ten.

In *The Time of Man* and *The Great Meadow* at least, the evidence seems very strong, in spite of the critical neglect of Miss Roberts' work in the last twenty years, that through her art she will in the future project herself into more than one century, that the odors of what is finest in the American tradition will blow out of her books to join what in future generations will be "kept treasured thus within, what is identical with the breadth of life."

Richard Ashman

*The Mountaintop*

The earth lay in the eye of the beholder  
Where russet hawthorn leaves, by autumn curled,  
Fell in the wind and hurried on the world  
To find a shelter by the gray-green boulder.  
The pasture shivered and the wind blew colder  
And leaves flew faster as the fresh gust whirled  
Across the azure of that sky, unfurled  
Below the sun that tapped upon my shoulder.

A rocky field! I saw, deep in the West,  
The Shenandoah Valley, bright and still,  
And in the East the lambent flames caressed  
The orange hills that shelter Charlottesville.  
And there, below a cloudlet's sunlit pillow,  
Shone white the western walls of Monticello.

## BOOK REVIEWS

THE TRANSLATIONS OF EZRA POUND. Introduced by *Hugh Kenner*.  
New Directions. 1953.

THE LITERARY ESSAYS OF EZRA POUND. Edited and introduced by  
*T. S. Eliot*. New Directions. 1954.

The publication of these two collections comes at a time when the small literary public, with no dissenters of any consequence, has acknowledged Pound's seminal importance in 20th Century letters. From now on we may expect to see a furious round of editing, commentary, explication and biography-writing, even while the poet has not yet completed his major composition. Pound has successfully outlived the period when he was so conveniently overlooked, and the presence of his work—both verse and prose—will undoubtedly force certain re-evaluations within the still undefined literary history of our age. What will the academic anthologies eventually call this age? As the century plays out, the term Modern loses its force and whatever meaning it may have had a generation ago. In any case, we know we have been living in an exhilarating period, and only thorough malcontents would really disown its characteristic triumphs in the arts.

Nevertheless, the university lecturer, to say nothing of the vanishing common reader, may well have difficulty in seeing the focal points of activity during the last three generations. These volumes, together with the memoirs of Ford Madox Ford, make it quite plain that London 1910-1920 was the crucial center of Anglo-American letters. One can assert that most of the development of the following decades—whether in Paris or Bloomsbury or the American South—may be attributed in various degrees to the work of James, Pound, Joyce, Eliot, Yeats, Ford, Conrad, and even the later Hardy. Naturally one can lose sight of this fact when confronted by inflated reputations, angry counterclaims, diluted styles: observe, for example, the loss of stylistic distinction from *Ulysses* to Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* to Jean-Paul Sartre's recent trilogy. It is not likely that in the foreseeable future we shall have a liter-

ary capital comparable to London during the First War, and there is little possibility of another Ezra Pound's organizing his associates with such splendid results.

## I

Even at the nadir of his prestige, during the late 1930's, Pound was sometimes thought of as a superb translator; indeed R. P. Blackmur and others suggested that his most effective work is precisely that which is transformed from other men's texts. This view, inadequate as it is to an understanding of Pound's achievement, does point to an important feature of his poetic world: the boldly imaginative juxtaposition of diverse cultural experiences, from Confucian China to contemporary America. The "modalities" of the translations have been absorbed into the *Cantos*, where they are played off against each other in terms of an encompassing pattern.

The collection under review, then, consists of several well-known translations, mostly from 1910-1920: the Chinese *Cathay* and the Anglo-Saxon *Seafarer*; the Japanese *Noh* plays with the critical notes by Ernest Fenollosa; Guido Cavalcanti's Sonnets, Ballatas and the famous Canzone "Donna mi Prega" with Italian texts; and Arnaut Daniel's poems, with Provençal texts. Less important are the prose paragraphs by Rémy de Gourmont entitled *Dust for Sparrows* and a few miscellaneous poems from French, Italian and Latin. Since the publisher is releasing the Translations and the Literary Essays almost simultaneously, I am unable to understand why a certain amount of duplication has occurred: the Arnaut Daniel poems are available within the context of Pound's critical commentary that Mr. Eliot includes in the Essays; Cavalcanti's Canzone appears in both volumes; and *Cathay* and the *Seafarer* have long been available in *Personae*, Pound's version (1917) of the Dialogues of Fontenelle would have been a sensible choice, to establish his early interest in the French 18th Century. I assume that this volume is intended for the needs of the moment, and as such it certainly fulfills one kind of purpose.

Mr. Kenner points out in his introduction that Pound put less of himself in the *Noh* than he did in the Provençal and

Chinese poems (it is significant that *Noh* does not figure prominently in the *Cantos*). Nevertheless, these plays are our most valuable means of access to traditional Japanese culture, which is by no means extinct today. And now that Macmillian has finally seen fit to publish the Collected Plays of Yeats, we can observe how that poet was profoundly influenced by *Noh* from 1917 to his final dramatic successes in 1938.

Pound's later translations (which fall outside the scope of this review) have been from Confucius—the *Unwobbling Pivot* and the *Great Digest*, the *Analects*, and now the *Odes* (to be published by Harvard University Press this season). These are not only important in themselves, they are indispensable to an understanding of the *Cantos*.

## II

Reading through the *Essays*, I am impressed once more by the authority with which Pound approached the literary events of forty years ago. Here are the pioneering studies of Joyce, Eliot, Lewis, Frost and the later Yeats, the shrewd examination of Williams' fiction and Lawrence's verse, the fine recognition of Ford. Pound's critical interests, however, were scarcely restricted to the work of his contemporaries: he assembled, if not "gathered from the air," a tradition which reaches from Confucius to Henry James. Its high moments are Homer; Ovid, Catullus and Propertius; the Provençal poets; Cavalcanti and Dante; Chaucer; Villon; Voltaire; Stendhal and Flaubert; Gautier, Corbière and Rimbaud. This is a poet's tradition, and it is nearly always informed by the accomplishments of the Mediterranean world.<sup>1</sup> But he also brought to the attention of his readers, among other things, Arthur Golding's Elizabethan translation of Ovid (generally unknown even now), George Crabbe's long poems, Landor's *Imaginary Conversation*, and Browning's extraordinary *Sordello*. Nowadays he will insist, with some justification, that an educated American should know the late correspondence of Jefferson and John Adams, Van Buren's Autobiography, and Brooks Adams' writings on economics and history.

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<sup>1</sup>Ford's *The March of Literature* (1938) is a more leisurely account of the same tradition, judged largely by the precepts of the impressionist novel.

Certain omissions among the hundreds of entries listed in the index suggest one or two comments to this reviewer. The names of Descartes, Locke, Hobbes, Newton, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Russell and Wittgenstein do not appear. Nietzsche, Spengler and Freud ("a sex crank") are curtly dismissed. Pound, in fact, sometimes writes as though the "dissociation of sensibility" had never occurred; but he is by no means unaware of the turn that Western philosophy took after 1600; nor is he necessarily dismayed.<sup>2</sup>

Since he is mainly interested in society at its linguistic level, he well understands that human communication breaks down when the language is exhausted by abstraction; and he assumes that revitalization of the language by the way of the image or the ideogram is basic to social well-being. Hence, an entire historic process of linguistic attrition, which some literary men think started even before the 18th Century, may be cured by a kind of scientific (i.e., ideogrammic) method. Pound, whose real scientific hero is Louis Agassiz, often commends the procedure of biologists (precise examination, comparison and description) as the proper model for literary studies. In an essay on W. H. Hudson (1920), unfortunately missing from this collection, he not only praises the special vitality of observation in that writer, he remarks the interpenetration of the naturalist and the poet.

Indeed, Pound's bias has always been towards those writers who exhibit a firm grasp of particular objects, as against those who, like Virgil and Tennyson, work the possibilities of a single inclusive style. I am all the more surprised, then, to discover that he rated Swinburne as high as he did in 1918; or perhaps he was comparing Swinburne, the translator of Villon, with Sir Edmund Gosse, a particularly obtuse member of the vested interests with whom Pound and Eliot once had to contend. The characteristic Poundian critical prose, always full of vehemence, leaping from point to point, makes its effects through comparisons:

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<sup>2</sup>The impact of the Newtonian world-view on the poetic sensibility has probably been overstated by certain influential critics during the past generation. In a recent issue of *The Twentieth Century* (London, March 1954) Mr. Donald Davie re-examines the subject and finds it more complex than these critics have supposed.



The afflatus which has driven great artists to blurt out the facts of life with directness or with cold irony, or with passion, and with always precision; which impels Villon to write—

“Necessity makes men run wry,  
And hunger drives the wolf from the wood;”

which impels Homer to show Hermes replying to Calypso—

“You, a goddess, ask me who am a god,  
Nevertheless I will tell you the truth;”

which in contact with Turgenev builds a whole novel into the enforcement of some one or two speeches, so that we have, as the gaunt culmination, some phrase about the “heart of another” or the wide pardon in Maria Timofevna’s “Nothing but death is irrevocable” [in *A Nest of Gentlefolk*]; this urge, this impulse (or perhaps it is a different urge and impulse) leads Tennyson into pretty embroideries.

I quote this passage as being representative of an almost unscrupulous honesty. Only the reader who has fully encountered Villon, Homer and Turgenev, as well as Tennyson, can decide whether the latter has been victimized by what may appear to be a hasty comparison.

I can hardly think that Pound intended every one of his judgments to be permanent. After all, he was a poet who was writing criticism which was polemical in the best sense: he was trying to create a milieu receptive to his own work as well as to that of his contemporaries. The best of his criticism, like his work of translation, has been assimilated into his poetry. It is difficult to say which of these essays will become part of that small body of criticism which survives those who write it. The pieces on the Provençal poets, Cavalcanti and the Elizabethan translators look as though they will be valuable for a long time. The long essay on James and most of the others dealing with the moderns are mines of insight which have seldom been explored; after three decades of Joyce criticism only Mr. Kenner has caught up with Pound on that particular score. Otherwise, one should read *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), the *ABC of Reading* (1934) and *Culture* (1938) to assess the full range of Pound’s critical powers, which are impressive.

ASHLEY BROWN

SELF CONDEMNED. By Wyndham Lewis. Methuen. 1954.

This, Lewis's first extended fiction since 1941, is not a well-made novel but a slow and terrible wind, gathering force for 400 pages, dying to occasional doldrums in whose hush the novelist carries on out of habit, renewing itself from resources beneath the social world, at length blowing all things flat with its oppressive silent force and leaving the hero crazed and deafened in a bleak American sunlight. René Harding exposes himself to this Siberian force by what he considers to be an act of secession from the human conspiracy to pretend that the world is a neutral and often diverting peepshow:

What portion in the world can the artist have  
Who has awakened from the common dream  
But dissipation and despair?

Harding, well past the threshold of academic celebrity, has resigned from a professorship of history in London because he can no longer believe that the history he is professing—a chronicle of “gilded thugs and plumed beribboned directors of homicide” whose guilt bestows “a mystical sanction upon their childishness, dishonesty, or ferocity”—concerns anything of importance. The 20th Century’s “arabesques of creation and destruction . . . propaganda of brotherly love at the point of a pistol, and *la haine créatrice*” seem to him an equally infuriating Punch and Judy show, displayed for Mr. Everyman’s diversion in daily papers whose contents might have been dreamed by Mickey Spillane. So he resigns, with a public statement, and the first part of the book describes his isolation as if with ruler and compass.

There is no way of making his wife understand, nor his French mother, nor his sisters, nor their husbands. One of his brothers-in-law, an Ersatz gentleman with “the languid drawl of a vaudeville toff” who “by profession was third on the notepaper of a not-very-prosperous Publicity business,” sees before him only an ex-professor to be put in his place. “With questions of *status* Victor was very familiar . . . And when one of his two partners passed down to him some ‘name’ of a client on the down-grade, no longer worthy of their attention, he enjoyed saying, ‘Now, Mr. X., let us face

it squarely, you are no longer front-page stuff!" So he feels safe in being offensive, and when René tells his sister,

"He has nothing to apologize for. If you marry a gutter-rat you should study a little the mentality of your... bed-fellow,"

the egregious Victor continues with impunity:

He still used the back of his chair to hook his arm over, and he addressed himself to his wife.

"Cads who insult their sisters..."

"Are you drunk?..." Janet screamed at him.

"No, no more than anybody else here. What I was saying was that cads who insult their sisters are certainly unfit to wear the academic regalia" (he drawled out "regalia" with extraordinary unction). "That they should *resign* is the best thing they could do."

Victor is the guttersnipe average, who keeps sniffing after an inside story and transforms everything into a Publicist's sensational terms. But René's interview with another brother-in-law doesn't even yield the satisfaction of a slanging-match. Percy Lamport, a wealthy insurance executive who reads left-wing papers and is devoted to Auden, Orwell and Matisse, sees before him an "idealist":

"It is I who have to thank you for setting all of us an example of fearless courage, of facing up to obscurantism and hypocrisy, the conservative mind which crushes all life out of our institutions. . . . My dear chap, it is inexpressibly fine, it is to have done a great public service."

There is no way of communicating with this man who thinks he understands; his Marxism "was simply transmuted into romance, into British dare-to-be-a-danielism," and any gesture of nonconformity he sees as directed against the Tories and "that very bad man" Mr. Churchill. He professes to wish that he had René's guts, and presses on him a cheque for a thousand pounds. Looking back on parting, "René saw him as a large bird, a hen-bird, a bird's-nest upon its head, transfixed in a dream of exultant intensity; a bird who has just laid a splendid golden egg."

These are two of the ten or so people whose incomprehension, surveyed in detail in Part One, delimits René's self-ostracism.

In September 1939 he and his vacuously libidinous wife sail for Canada, to enter their course of slow destruction.

The Canadian void in which they find themselves, incarnated in the run-down Room, "twenty-five feet by twelve," in the cockroach-infested Hotel Blundell where for three years they are virtually imprisoned by lack of money, simply externalises what René (whose name means "reborn") has come to consider the normal human void. The sun "with a great display of geniality glittering over the frosty backyards," the cold "as impossible to keep out as radium," the light that "seems to bang you in the face as it glares in at the window," the "Yahoo Summer—in contrast to the Indian Summer—"an "indecent explosion of silly heat": all these things epitomize a human icepack from which grotesque janitors, waitresses and prostitutes detach themselves occasionally to caper irrationally through the hotel, in an odd throwback to the effects of *The Wild Body*.

Everything in England (Part One) has its counterpart in Canada (Part Two); the opaque benevolent idealist Percy Lamport, for instance, reappears as a wealthy transvestite "bookman" named Furber, who pays René fifty dollars a month to help him decide, for instance, whether a new deluxe edition of de Sade will be a worthwhile acquisition. And the microcosmic Blundell Hotel, though the life it contains is much more bleak and hysterical, corresponds point for point with the apartment house René and Hester formerly inhabited in London, with its water-closet in the hall, its plumber who had trouble with his truss, its Dickensian charlady, and its blowsy male and female tenants who paid sly visits to one another's rooms. This apartment-house during the Blitz lost its thin facade of gentility:

... the cellar was full of dead leaves and a wild cat has established its home there, a brood of wild kittens springing about among the leaves. This wild cat so terrorized the tenants that they dared not go down to their trash bins just outside the cellar door.

René's response to this news springs from his terrible perspicacity:

Professor Harding's comment was that the House that Jack Built was always built in the same way. And its destiny was

in accordance with its architecture. Some houses built by Jack attracted incendiaries, some did not. But it did not matter whether they did or whether they did not. All in the end had wild cats in their cellars, for civilization never continued long enough to keep the wild cats out—if you call it civilization, René Harding would shout.

The Canadian Hotel does attract incendiaries; it is gutted by a spectacular midwinter fire, and transformed into a gigantic hollow iceberg by the firemen's hoses. This transformation of the commonplace by fire and then ice epitomizes what has slowly happened to René's character; he starts sprucing himself to accept "success" in Canada just when his wife, unhinged by the catastrophe, has grown irrationally determined to return to England, where things are humanly just the the same but personally familiar. His waxing success—a job and renewed celebrity—is counterparted by a "neuropathic duet" with Hester; she finally throws herself under a truck in a spectacular last gesture of coercion. Recovering amid "white silence" from this shock, René surrenders himself to Canadian, and then American, academic prestige, totally eviscerated and transformed into a behaviourist prolongation of what he had elected to be in London five years earlier.

He no longer even believed in his theories of a new approach to History: that had become almost a racket; for him it had all frozen into a freak anti-historical museum, of which he was the Keeper, containing many libellous wax-works of famous kings and queens. He carried on mechanically what the bright, rushing, idealistic mind of another man had begun. The man of former days had been replaced by a machine, which was a good imitation of the reality, which had superficially much of the charm, even the vivacity of the living model, but, when it came to one of the acid tests of authenticity, it would be recognized as an impostor.

Though given to occasional uprushes of hysteria, he resembles most of the time the burnt-out Hotel Blundell, "an enormous cave, full of mighty icicles as much as thirty feet long, and as thick as a tree, suspended from the skeleton of the roof. Below, one looked down into an icy labyrinth: here and there vistas leading the eye on to other caverns: and tunnels ending in mirrors, it seemed . . .

This hollow berg was an unearthly creation, dangerous to enter because so unstable." René is a fit inhabitant of the academic "cemetery of shells;" the book ends with his promotion to a great Eastern U.S. campus:

... and the Faculty had no idea that it was a glacial shell of a man who had come to live among them, mainly because they were themselves unfilled with anything more than a little academic stuffing.

Lewis's axes of reference are unchanged; René Harding is still The Enemy of the Stars, and his creator still regards social reality as a void enlivened by paper-maché action; but the presentation has for the first time a terrible weight of lived authenticity. The "cliffs of cadaverous beaming force" at which Arghol shook his fist in 1914 were by comparison rather romantic "machines of prey," and Arghol wasn't destroyed, he was merely killed. In the mid-1930's Lewis underwent a loss of belief in the will by which he had up to then created, and in 1937 in the person of Margot Stamp took tentative glimpses into a "false-bottom beneath all things" whose existence he believed in from a newly-tapped level of his own being, uncorrupted by the poses of the Vorticist. In *Self Condemned* he steps as an artist at last into that void, into which Margot merely peered, and articulates it from within. The brilliance is no longer word-deep, and the style, for the first time in a Lewis novel, lacks any trace of the satiric impulse. The mounting force of the book derives from Lewis's steady invention of meaningful incidents, and from situations sufficiently compelling, held in focus long enough to induce the requisite vertigo. The structural backbone of the book, the rendition of personalities undergoing slow emaciation during three years' hysterical tedium in a cheap hotel room, exists with a steely nervous strength that whole pages of inessential anecdote cannot weaken.

René's tragedy is pivoted on the fact that his original brilliance was false, however right his contentions; was a seeking for the exhilarating role of opposition and so a seeking of void, not a hunger for the solid, though it is as a hunger for reality amid manifold illusions that he disguises it to himself. There is enough truth in his opinions to make them plausible as an "enlightened"

modus vivendi, and enough sham in what he reacts against to make him more than a poseur. But opposites belong to the same species, and so he returns to terms, in the "cemetery of shells," with the academicism from which he had in the beginning dissociated himself.

Whether this is the inevitable tragedy of intelligence, or only a doom attending the false use of intelligence, is a question that doesn't affect the solidity of what Lewis has written. He has not always written it equally well; there are whole chapters that could be dropped ("The Private Life of Bill Murdoch," for instance), superfluous and repetitive scenes, chapters (like "The Ribbon of the Legion of Honour") that haven't the intensity as writing that they seem to require as structure, moments when we start attending to René and find ourselves listening to Lewis, and prolonged stretches when a point is being reinforced rhetorically after being well established concretely. But all the faults in the world won't break such a novel. The major chapters—the opening, certain of the interviews in England, the rendition of life in the Canadian hotel room, the fire, the body in the morgue, René's hysterical progress toward what looks to his colleagues like recovery, surpass anything Lewis has ever written. No other living novelist has such power at his command; and no other English novelist alive or dead could have articulated so compellingly so Aeschylean a story.

HUGH KENNER

A SOUND OF VOICES DYING. By Glenn Scott. Dutton. 1954.

PICTURES FROM AN INSTITUTION. By Randall Jarrell. Knopf. 1954.

"Education," writes Jacques Barzun in his lively study, *Teacher in America*, "is indeed the dullest of subjects and I intend to say as little about it as I can." What Professor Barzun has in mind, of course, is that depressing abstraction, *Education*, so often hovering on the lips of PTA members, college presidents, and *Reader's Digest* writers. His feeling, apparently, is shared by the authors of an increasing number of novels about university life.

This phenomenon, it might be added, is due probably not merely to the fact that more and more writers are becoming variously attached to academic life but further because the contemporary university offers a relatively stable and articulate culture, cut down to convenient laboratory size. In her brilliant and diabolical *The Groves of Academe*, for instance, Mary McCarthy writes with the bitter enthusiasm of an anthropologist reporting on a backward—and distasteful—community of African pygmies.

The glimpses of academic life afforded by a book like Robie Macauley's *The Disguises of Love*—a novel whose subtleties have been unnecessarily misunderstood, most recently and absurdly by Stanley Hyman in *The Hudson Review*—are less angry but, because Mr. Macauley has no particular axe to grind, possibly more devastating. The trouble, one judges from these and similar sources, is that American colleges, preoccupied with Mr. Barzun's *Education*, tend to lose touch with more pressing actualities, like commerce, war, and baseball games. They become, in short, the background for an accumulation of cloistered absurdities—to be equilibrated, of course, only by the absurdities of a similarly inclusive microcosm, say a business corporation.

Two interesting new novels offer different and complementary approaches. Glenn Scott, whose first novel has not escaped that peculiar impulse which makes American fiction read like a series of initiation rites, would probably be the last to deny that some kind of education, some learning process, does take place at college—but he would also probably contend that this education is mostly extra-curricular, the product of time, growth, and all night bull-sessions. *A Sound of Voices Dying* carries young Reid Carrington through his first nine months at Philips-Whitehead, a small "gentleman's school" in Virginia,

... where the faculty is slightly more interesting than the students, and where both are dull. There are, the Dean of the University will insist, echoes of the voices of the great men who have passed this way to be found within the two-hundred-year-old walls. Perhaps this is really true. There are also the echoing cries, on party weekends, of drunken voices by men not so great—and these are by far louder than the former.



This does not mean, however, that Reid finds Philips-Whitehead (or, as the students call it, P-W) particularly deadly, or that Mr. Scott has written a dull book. The actual events are relatively simple, if a bit crowded for one school session. Mr. Scott's hero, a baffled romantic typically born to Prosperous Electrical Appliances, undergoes successively the rigors of fraternity rush-week, college level studies, new friendships, and two (possibly three) love affairs. He discovers, during Christmas vacation, that his parents, those usual scapegoats in college stories, are even duller—and *stranger*—than he had believed. He falls in love with and, which is perhaps more unusual, enjoys an affair with the unhappy wife of a fraternity brother. In the spring, his best friend is killed in an automobile wreck and, predictably, the wife decides that she is a bit too old for him after all. By the end of the term, his education has been mostly that of growing older, but he has had confirmed what he'd suspected, and what all college intellectuals always know, that there is more to Life than Electrical Appliances.

On the jacket, Mr. Scott's publishers seem determined to exploit him as the spokesman of our latest generation, as another Hemingway, Fitzgerald, or *Edna Millay*! (The italics are mine, of course.) Fortunately, Mr. Scott cannot be held responsible for the vagaries of his blurb writer, and maybe generations *do* require spokesmen to dictate their attitudes for him. Mr. Scott, by being honest, makes a point about his generation—the one dangling between college and draft board—that needs making; which is that it feels neither frantic, lost, nor very betrayed. It is a generation, Mr. Scott indicates, that has matured rapidly under tension and which tends more towards responsibility than hysteria. Better than his publishers, Mr. Scott knows that even generations are composed primarily of separate human beings.

Mr. Scott knows also the pace of college life, where something different is always happening and where things are always pretty much the same. He gives us the traditional scenes, inevitable as class bells, of inept instructors, fraternity initiations, and the ritual of wild weekend parties. In construction, he alternates chapters of action with chapters of conversation; and though his ear

is sometimes faulty as to rhythm, he does not fail to catch the tone of boredom, comedy, and wry seriousness which characterizes nightlong discussions in fraternity lounges. Finally, there is a good deal of what the dust-jacket describes with enthusiasm, and Mr. Scott in detail as "love-making."

It is, in fact, the love affair between Reid and Laura, the student's wife, that gives the story continuity. The Affair itself, however, is significant only as another action in shaping the personality of the protagonist, through whose consciousness events are filtered; this is the real substance of the book. The majority of young men at eighteen, however inclined toward the romantic condition, seldom think thoughts too deep for tears (though they sometimes contrive to look like it), and Mr. Scott has refused to inflate his hero. Reid is a person, like most others, to whom things happen, and his wisdom is finally nothing but an accumulation of experience. That a writer as young as Mr. Scott may at times write awkwardly is not half so important as that he nearly always writes honestly. It is this, after all, that his own generation, more than his publishers, will demand of him.

In *A Sound of Voices Dying*, one senses that the characters, and even Philips-Whitehead itself, exist only in a Berkeleyan relationship to the hero, ready to vanish when he leaves for summer vacation. In *Pictures from an Institution*, on the other hand, Randall Jarrell seems able to assume the entire fictional reality, independent of his narrator, of his characters and a progressive school called Benton. Readers of Mr. Jarrell's criticism, incidentally, will be surprised and delighted by this novel; it is exactly what one expected and dared not hope for; who else could write about people, or a school, as though they were poems—*good poems*—and get away with it?

The title is informative, since *pictures* are precisely just what Mr. Jarrell does present; and the central image, of course, is Benton, described with such fullness, such wonder, delight, and exasperation that one feels a place so unlikely *ought* to exist. The narrator, no doubt the same *persona* who writes Mr. Jarrell's criticism (and who must have decided that verse criticism should be as well-written as verse) is a poet and teacher at Benton, one of

the uncomfortable ones; he quotes, with sympathy if not agreement, the remark of a former Benton professor:

Now that I'm not at Benton any more, I dream that I'm back sometimes, the way you dream that you're back in the army. In the army dream—it's touching—I always tell myself, "Now you've been in the army a long time, you know your way around, there's not a thing for you to worry about," and I go by the supply sergeant's and get myself some stuff, and get a couple of books at the Post library, and settle down to wait. But when I dream I'm back at Benton it's as if I were in a hot house or a—or with the Lotus-Eaters: I can feel Benton all over me like a warm bath, and I try to move my arms and legs, and I can't, and I say to myself, "You've got to get out of here. You've got to get out of here!" And then I wake up.

The movement of the book—Mr. Jarrell doesn't falsify Benton by inventing a plot—is provided by the arrival of the novelist Gertrude Johnson, newly hired to teach creative writing. Gertrude, who always does things "As a Novelist," finds Benton simply too good to be true: some of the characters are too perfect for her readers to accept. Benton, almost wholly insulated in its self-satisfaction, errs by holding too significant an opinion of itself; so Gertrude, brilliantly and sympathetically characterized by Jarrell, is betrayed into unreality by her own false perspective:

The world was the arsenal Gertrude used against the world. She felt about anything: If it's not a weapon what am I doing with it? and it turned out to be a weapon. She knew that people must be, at bottom, like herself, and that was enough to justify—to make imperative—any measure she could take against them. And if everybody had been, at bottom, what Gertrude thought she was, she would have been right to behave as she behaved, though it would have been better simply to curse God and die.

The motive of *Pictures from an Institution* seems to me to be a search, by the narrator, for the quality of innocence; here as in his poetry, Mr. Jarrell is interested to define innocence by discovering it. Constance Morgan, the President's secretary and the most Jarrellian of these characters, is essentially innocent because she is young and because for her, as it is with some few people,

evil does not exist. The composer-in residence Dr. Rosenbaum, who knows he is second-rate, and his wife Irene are innocent in a different way—in the same way, Mr. Jarrell suggests, that a European is different from an American: they have accepted the existence of evil without choosing it, they are a sort of triumph of integrity. Even Benton, ignorant and irritating, has innocence: it has confused the world with itself.

For all these, the great contrast is Gertrude, who sees evil everywhere. Yet Gertrude, even Gertrude, can say that one loves dogs and children so much "only when you don't love people as much as you should."

*As much as you should* had a haunting overtone of *as much as I do*—an overtone, alas, too high for human ears. But bats heard it and knew, alone among living beings, that Gertrude loved.

After the end of the school session, when Gertrude and the rest have gone and the narrator is about to leave for the last time, he is called over by the sculpture instructor, Miss Rasmussen, to see her newest creation, a strange, wonderful statue made from a railroad tie; made by the welder's hands, the narrator reflects, of the same Miss Rasmussen who had always been for him, in appearance and personality, a potato bug.

She was a potato bug who had been visited by an angel, and I decided—decided unwillingly—for the rest of my life to suffer potato bugs gladly, since angels are not able to make the distinctions that we ourselves make between potato bugs and ourselves . . . I felt that I had misjudged Benton, somehow—for if I had misjudged Miss Rasmussen so, why not the rest of Benton?—and yet I didn't feel repentant, only confused, and willingly confused; I was willing in its turn for Benton to misjudge me. I signed with it then a separate peace. There was no need for us to judge each other, we said, we knew each other too well; we knew each other by heart.

*Pictures from an Institution* is subtitled "a comedy," and of course it is; but I hope I have made it clear that it is a good deal more: it is an intelligent, mature, and truly witty novel. Mr. Jar-

rell understands, as his Gertrude does not, that characters are first of all human beings; he writes about them with warmth, perception and, of all things, love.

THOMAS H. CARTER

PURITY OF DICTION IN ENGLISH VERSE. By *Donald Davie*. Oxford. 1953.

*"...To purify the dialect of the tribe..."\**

Mr. Davie writes with poise, clarity, and an acute sense of system. He shares, then, the virtues of his heroes: the very language—Mr. Davie would call it "diction"—of his book is a model of propriety and reasoned sympathy; a vindication, by example, of that decorum which, not only in the eighteenth century, he finds, distinguishes, explicates, and defends.

"Diction" is the central word of the book. Mr. Davie defines it, illustrates it positively and by contrast, circles it with historical circumstances, comes back to it continually for review and redefinition, examines it in the light of every variety of poem. The preliminary claim he makes for it appears modest enough: that understanding what it means will help us to arrive at an appreciation of certain poetry—inaccessible to the temper and the rules-of-thumb of most contemporary criticism—which makes up much of the good, though perhaps none of the great, poetry in English. Mr. Davie is even willing to grant that the distinction between great poetry and good may be regarded, for the stricter purposes of his argument, as the distinction between poetry and verse:

One feels that Hopkins could have found a place for every word in the language if only he could have written enough poems. One feels the same about Shakespeare. But there are poets, I find, with whom I feel the other thing—that a selection has been made and is continually being made, that words are thrusting at the poem and being fended off from it, that however many poems these poets wrote certain words would never be allowed into the poems, except

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\*T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*.

as a disastrous oversight. These different feelings we have, when we read English poetry, justify us in talking of the language of the one kind of poet, and in the diction of the other kind, of the poetry of the one and the verse of the other.

Mr. Davie distinguishes further:

... if a bad diction is the result of selecting from the language at random, according to the whim of fashion, then good diction comes from making a selection from the language on reasonable principles and for a reasonable purpose.

And, citing Arnold's regret for "the absence, from English writing, of 'the tone of the centre'," Mr. Davie pulls the wraps off at last:

A chaste diction is "central," in Arnold's sense; it expresses the feeling of the capital, not the provinces. And it can do because it is central in another way, central to the language, this because it is central in another way, central to the language, conversational not colloquial, poetic not poetical. The effect is a valuable urbanity, a civilized moderation and elegance; and this is the effect attainable, as I think, by Goldsmith, and not by Shakespeare.

Nor is Mr. Davie's "urbanity" Byronism (or its most celebrated recent dilution in the poems of Mr. Auden), the exploiting of a pose in a social vacuum:

... ever since [Byron] "urbanity" has meant the manner of Don Juan, an assurance never occupied but only acknowledged as the poet veers past it, a sort of raffish insouciance, above all a pervasive irony. After this a poet can write about nothing, and defend himself with irony. A poet has only one subject—himself.

We have heard Mr. Davie's historical arguments before: the temporary attainment and the irredeemable loss of a community of accepted and solid beliefs, the poet's consequent loss of a reliable audience, Romanticism as not a renaissance but a collapse of moral and poetic values, the fragmentation of modern life; and, like all arguments to "prove" or "disprove" that this large social breakdown caused that general literary collapse, they are ultimately

more provocative than enlightening. What does stand firm, without requiring us to share Mr. Davie's (perhaps justifiable) nostalgia, is his examination of the now unfashionable poetry that he admires, and his specific insights into the unfashionable ways in which it makes its effects.

Most of his examples come, of course, from the post-Augustan eighteenth century, and some of the poets—apart from his obvious and particular touchstone, Dr. Johnson himself—for whom Mr. Davie makes interesting cases are Goldsmith, Shenstone, Collins, Charles Wesley, and Cowper. If, as Mr. Davie observes, one of the functions of pure diction in poetry is "to purify the language by revivifying dead metaphor, we shall look for purity of diction in writing at the end of a strong tradition"; Pope, says Mr. Davie, is "an original, revolutionary poet, expanding the language, creating metaphors, and creating, through them, new areas of meaning," the *great* poet, for whom questions of diction yield to questions of language, but who by the force of his example and influence creates such a tradition. A tradition, moreover, implies a community in and by which it is carried on. The poets who aim at purity of diction appeal, then, to tradition and, as responsible members of a responsive community, to common usage, "the language of the tribe," which it is their function not to alter or expand, but to correct and purify. The criteria of these poets are the criteria of prose—economy in metaphor, clarity of syntax and idea; the poetic life is in an "impulse towards shapeliness," a conciseness and pointing up by means of a number of devices now profoundly unfashionable.

Mr. Davie discusses and defends, often with brilliant persuasiveness, the most important of these devices: (1) abundance of epithet, demonstrated by him to be in many instances a method of keeping the verb clear of adverbs, which are transformed into modifiers of the noun, and so obliging the verb to stand forcefully alone, as in Johnson's

For such the steady Romans shook the world;

(2) "the true personification, the one with the force of metaphor" (distinguished from personification in the allegorical set-piece), which results from, and makes use of, the logical shift of adverb to

adjective, the "habit of throwing metaphorical force from noun to verb," as in Johnson's

Till Want now following, fraudulent and slow,  
Shall spring to seize thee, like an ambush'd foe;

(3) the reanimation, by a stubborn consistency in image, of dead metaphor, as in Wesley's

Strike with the hammer of Thy word,  
And break these hearts of stone;

(4) generalization, which, less convincingly, Mr. Davie tries to justify as proceeding from a sense of function rather than of appearance, as implying an induction "from the specific instance towards the divine law ("grove" for all possible groupings of trees, "gale" for every velocity of wind); and (5) circumlocution, which he shows to be useful for accomplishing minor shifts of tone, and with which he tries, least convincingly, to sympathize in such mannered trivialities as Gay's fables ("greedy tyrant" for a tiger about to eat, "shaggy lord" for a lion: "as the lion is king of beasts," says Mr. Davie solemnly, "it is correct and exact to denote him by 'the shaggy lord,'" though the more frivolous reader is likely to observe only a vicious "refinement" and perhaps the personal fact that social-lion Gay just didn't care for unbarbered beasts).

Dr. Davie is in dead earnest: a trait undeniably helpful to the critic who has set about rehabilitating the critical reputation of such—in proclaimed purpose, at least—plain, sober, no-nonsense verse as that of the post-Augustans. But one begins to suspect, from time to time, that if the author is so close as to feel with, he may also be too close to see clearly, the range and quality of what he is discussing; that what he brings to our attention, in an album of lovingly chosen favorites, is an excellent kind of verse existing primarily in the honorable intentions rather than in the production of a half-century; that, for example, abundance of epithet very often becomes, in practice, a clogged agglomeration of point-less if not misleading or inaccurate adjectives, as with the "soft maids" and "melting virgins" of Collins' "Song from Cymbeline," as in almost all of Gray, including the "Elegy" ("The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn"), as in most of the minor verse of the



period, as in Johnson, whose epithets seem, on occasion, to emerge mechanically from the balance and antithesis they are intended to serve. And when Mr. Davie shows himself so walled in as to be unaware of the comedy that threatens any fanatic insistence, at the expense of common usage, on a literary convention, as in Denham's long passage soberly personifying the Thames:

His genuine and less guilty wealth t'explore,  
Search not his bottom, but survey his shore . . .

when he uses this as an example of pure diction and disciplined tone, then it seems that Mr. Davie has lost all perspective, and forgotten that Dr. Johnson's own disciples, locked in the prison of what Mr. Davie calls "bourgeois-pious diction," were capable of laughing at the master when he unwarily praised a lady's "bottom of good sense." It may be heretical to suggest that the conventions within which the post-Augustans worked were not only very narrow and exclusive (however modest and praiseworthy in aim), but in practice far less amenable to common usage, and even common sense, than they appear to have been in aim and theory. Nostalgia is, after all, a treacherous guide; it misrepresents not only the past to us, but us to ourselves; and it is not surprising to find Mr. Davie, eventually, sinking into the most bottomless of journalistic clichés on contemporary verse:

. . . one cannot avoid the fact that the poet's churches are empty and the strong suspicion that dislocation of syntax has much to do with it. After all, there is no denying that modern poetry is obscure and that it would be less so if the poets adhered to the syntax of prose.

It is time to note that Mr. Davie is most convincing, most confidently and freely instructive, about poets who are out of the tradition altogether, and whom he examines not to vindicate, but to discover whether the concept of pure diction has any relevance to their work. It is in his examinations of Shelley and Hopkins chiefly, and secondarily of Wordsworth and Coleridge, that the concept comes to full life, that it demonstrates its general value as an instrument of criticism. So Mr. Davie points out the non-Byronic urbanity of which Shelley was capable, but which, without an audience capable of responding to it, he early abandoned;

the "decadent" criticism and poetry of Hopkins, both of which Mr. Davie authoritatively tests by the standard of pure diction; Coleridge's choice (or, though Mr. Davie seems not to think so, temperamental defect) of improvisation and his "deliberate courting of impurities in diction;" Wordsworth's "private language" as opposed to "the perfection of a common language," except in his single considerable venture into urbanity, "The White Doe of Rylstone."

Freed of his self-conscious responsibility toward Dr. Johnson's common reader, and toward the non-existent contemporary common reader whom he likes to think he is writing for, Mr. Davie makes genuine discoveries, builds an original criticism in which nostalgia evaporates and the influence of his gratefully acknowledged mentors, Mr. Eliot and Dr. Leavis, is at last perfectly assimilated. The concept of the book is such a discovery and a major one, it sustains itself even against the author's occasional abuse of it; and the book is an achievement, not only of particular insights, but—much rarer in criticism—of scheme and idea. It is a book that will have to be taken into account, especially by those who find in it a great deal with which to disagree.

MARVIN MUDRICK

THE MIND OF THE SOUTH. By *W. J. Cash*. Anchor Books. 1954.

A great deal of insight occurs in this book despite the distortions created by doctrinal adhesions. Cash stages the drama of the mind of the South in his own mind. He was torn to pieces by its conflicts.

Merely as a Canadian I have something to say about the North-South clash that no American has said. Canada stands to the Yankee world very much in the same relation as did the Confederacy. In the first place its economy, like that of the South, is a staple economy. That is to say, it is an extremely unstable economy, able to sustain its transportation system only with federal aid. Like the South, Canada remained frontier territory and resisted town development much longer than the Yankee world. Canada remained

within the fur trade network for a century after the American colonies fought their way out of it. (The work of H. A. Innis has shown how the Revolutionary War of 1776 was a struggle between the international power of the fur trade and the local interest of "settlement.") What the plantation was to the South the fur trade was to Canada. Like the South, Canada is strongly and typically tinged with the Scot-Gaelic heritage with all that it implies of clan feeling, romantic nostalgia, personal loyalties, and sentiment for the past. As in the South the Scot-Gaelic heritage is here fused with the English concept of the gentleman. Like the Southerner the Canadian is often naive, typically unteachable, and profoundly distrustful of bigness, bureaucracy, and central power. Like the Southerner he is paradoxically an extreme individualist and an instinctive conformist. He is torn between his vertical bias and his horizontal stress. (All these oddities mostly march in step with the French in Canada, but that is another story.) Canada knows as little of the South as the South knows of Canada. Both imagine that the other is merely an extension of the Yankee technological mentality.

My own interest in the South started naturally with Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, those typically Southern boys. But twenty years ago, involved in tracing the cultural and educational impact of the trivium and quadrivium, it struck me that the basic clash which recurred in antiquity, the middle ages, and in the Renaissance between "science" and "humanism," between logic and rhetoric was the same as the clash between North and South on this continent. The clash between space and time, between two conceptions of man and society. As a Catholic I see no real basis for this clash since the doctrines on both sides seem to me at once false and true. And it is not the truth in these doctrines which causes the clash.

Since it is impossible for the human mind to entertain a merely false idea except casually, it follows that any conception by which men have lived for some time contains an important element of truth. But it also follows that the ideas embodied in any one culture, especially when that culture is predominant, will be a travesty of the wholeness and harmony possible to man. Naturally,

therefore, any free intelligence within any one culture will be critical of its limitations and prone to admire the complementary aspects of culture elsewhere. Anybody will admit the force of this with respect to music and the arts. But everybody is an unconscious specialist when it comes to life styles.

Perhaps that is where the Canadian can offer something of value. He has inherited rather than fashioned a way of life. He is poised between British, French, and Yankee modes of life without any deep sense of commitment to any of them. Canada is not a melting pot and neither does it offer a way of life. It is a cultural frontier minus the exigencies and urgencies of the frontier. The Canadian vice is tepidity, the virtue is detachment. The Canadian has an historical sense because he has never broken with his past, but has no feeling of future mission.

I offer these points of view by way of preface to my comments on *The Mind of the South*, because the South is a hot issue still, but one about which I have very mild feelings. To Canadians, American life North and South appears livid with passions and violence. We cannot share those passions and violence, but we can try to understand their origin and operation. Yet we experience a certain envy for the intensities we cannot share.

*The Mind of the South* represents a summation of the past fifty years of economic and sociological study of the South carried out by hundreds of university-trained people. This work had tended to debunk the legend of the South. Cash admits and defends the debunking but asserts the legend. He asserts the legend not only because he felt it as an actual inspiration, but, objectively and regretfully, he felt sure that the traditional life was more powerful to subdue the new machine culture than the machine was to eradicate the old dream.

To my mind the postulates on which the scientific study of the South has been carried out are dubious. Compared to the holistic approach of current anthropology the statistical analysis of the economist looks very porous. Even the Turner thesis about the frontier which sustains Cash and Constance Rourke is today not satisfactory. Why did the German, the Pole, the Hungarian, and the Swede fail to adopt the *role* of the frontiersman? Why did that

role come so naturally to the Englishman and even the Frenchman? And here is a role that provides the central paradox of the Southern man, the combination of intense individual and intense group loyalty. It is the role of the cowboy and the frontier scout, and the sleuth of the Holmes, Philip Marlowe clan. "If the common white," says Cash, "with the back-country hot within him, was likely to carry a haughtiness like that of the Spanish peasant underneath his slouch, very well, so far from challenging and trampling on that, his planter neighbors in effect allowed it, gave it boundless room—nay even encouraged it and invited it on to growth." Cash sees this character, indomitable, intransigent, "simple direct, and immensely personal" as a product of the frontier plus the Gaelic component. But it is not a character of peasant origin, least of all in Spain. It is surely plain, on the other hand, that the feudal esquire as modified by Renaissance *sprezzatura* is near kin to this type. Pre-bourgeois man in Europe was vertical or individual but also horizontal in his class loyalty. The English Public School boy was the nineteenth century modification of the type to suit the needs of a shopkeeping world. But even the Public School Boy is the type most at home in the role of the frontiersman. The habit of rule, the love of adventure, the chase, the out-of-doors and loyalty to his class is as obvious in him as his distrust of intelligence and critical habits of mind.

The physical conditions of the South gave larger scope to the ideas embodied in this man than any other locale. But the locale didn't originate the ideas or the style. The mistake of the Darwinian and Spencerian investigators was to imagine that an aristocratic idea was born of spatial conditions. Cash wastes a good deal of space repeating the obvious fact that almost no gentleman came to settle in America and that the pretensions to aristocracy in the South were also bogus with respect to any physical standard of life. In England the aristocratic ideal is bogus too, at least on these terms. The ruling class has always been parvenu and commercial, by and large. One needn't like or dislike the aristocratic idea in order to see that the idea takes precedence over the physical circumstances in the long run. Cash makes that plain enough.

It is both his pride and his regret that the Southern defeat and attrition could only strengthen the idea.

Most of this thesis reposes on and becomes entangled in the current categories of time and space, vertical and horizontal. He tries to see the South in these terms. It is a time world. Therefore it is vertical and individualist. But it is also a space world. Therefore it is primitive, romantic, superstitious, instinctive, and hedonistic. As vertical it is out of step with the modern world. As horizontal it is more collectivized psychologically than the North. As vertical it loves rules, authority, action. As horizontal it is dreamy, tolerant, nostalgic, and sentimental. The categories, of course, are useless.

For the purpose of these categories he must and does ignore the South as the creative political center of the United States. He has to ignore the political thinkers and has to associate Southern legal obsession and rhetoric with the primitivistic, horizontal side of this thesis. The thesis cannot admit the idea that the South is a major graft from the European stock of ideas and impulse.

These remarks amount to saying that Cash treats the South as a monad Spengler-wise. But his inside view of this monad is a fascinating show.

HERBERT MARSHALL MCLUHAN

BOUVARD AND PECUCHET. By *Gustave Flaubert*. New Directions. 1954.

THE DICTIONARY OF ACCEPTED IDEAS. By *Gustave Flaubert*. New Directions. 1954.

SHENANDOAH DEPARTMENT OF COMPENSATIONS. In the Autumn 1952 number of this magazine we reprinted, from a 1922 *Mercure de France*, Ezra Pound's "James Joyce et Pécuchet," Englished for the first time (by Fred Bornhauser) and with a preface by Hugh Kenner. Both essays, of course, deal more than tangentially with Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and the *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues*. Now, early in 1954, New Directions has issued handsome new editions of both books. Although any connection (as a fiction

writer might put it) is probably pure coincidence, it is still highly gratifying to have these books adequately in print at last, particularly since they, more than others of Flaubert's works, have the most obvious affinity with the 20th Century, with the United States as much as France.

Most English readers, without having actually approached it, know that *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is the epic of two friends ("simple lucid, mediocre minds," as de Maupassant called them) who, attempting systematically to master all fields of knowledge, discover that one after another is contradictory and useless; René Descharmes has formularized it as "encyclopédie mise en farce." In his splendid Introduction to *Bouvard*, Lionel Trilling quotes Mr. Kenner's description of that novel: "... the book into which Flaubert emptied his voluminous notes on human gullibility, groundless learning, *opinions chic*, contradictory authorities, ridiculous enthusiasms, the swill of the 19th Century." This is apt, of course, but as Mr. Kenner indicated and Mr. Trilling is concerned to prove, such a view is only a partial perspective.

*Bouvard and Pécuchet* might be called the book Flaubert spent his life getting ready to write, painstakingly jotting down overheard absurdities, cliché expressions and, worse, cliché ideas. The bulk of this painful, wryly-comic collection went into *The Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*, which Jacques Barzun has now rendered into English. Surely the translation of clichés, depending largely on idiom and local reference, is no less frustrating than the translation of verse, though the difficulty is of a different order. A line-by-line comparison of Mr. Barzun's version is not called for. In reading it, one occasionally recalls the French with regret (PYRAMIDE, for instance: *Ouvrage inutile* vs. *Useless edifice*), but if one remembers instead the *impression* of the original, he cannot help being delighted by how well and often Barzun has caught Flaubert's exact tone.

With this edition in hand, there is no longer much excuse for believing that *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is the last folly of a great artist, a monumental joke that turned out to be Flaubert. (This translation, incidently, is by T. W. Earp and G. W. Stonier.) Mr. Trilling, after defining brilliantly *Bouvard and Pécuchet's* comic

mode of existence, is at some pains to demonstrate their universal nature: they live, like us, in a climate of ideas where the mind is continually forced to pass judgment on every aspect of culture; in a despair which is Flaubert's, they find this culture a sham which reduces intellectual aspiration to absurdity—but they do not, just as Flaubert does not, deny the life of the mind. Mr. Trilling suggests, in short, that this novel is simply a rejection of human culture. What remains, then, is that aspect of Christianity that Flaubert was able to accept entirely: the self affirmed in self-denial. The two friends belong, not with the objects of Flaubert's anger, but in the company of those other saints figured in *Trois Contes*—but I am truncating and distorting Mr. Trilling's subtle argument when I had intended only to recommend as heartily as possible these two books.

T.H.C.



## CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN ARTHOS teaches at the University of Michigan. The University Press has just published his *On a Mask Presented at Ludlow-Castle*.

RICHARD ASHMAN lives in New Orleans. A poem by him appeared in a recent issue of *The Beloit Poetry Journal*.

ROBERT BELOOF has appeared in *Shenandoah* before. He has received scholarships to Bread Loaf School of English for three successive summers.

CHRIS BJERKNES has published two books, *Orpheus Gone to Hell* and *First Communion*. He is a school teacher.

ASHLEY BROWN has been journeying over the Great Trade Route, from Tennessee to Provence, and back.

HARRY MODEAN CAMPBELL is co-author of *William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal*. His essay in this issue is a condensed version of a chapter from a forthcoming book on Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

THOMAS H. CARTER is a recent contributor to *The Hudson Review* and *The Kenyon Review*.

HUGH KENNER'S book on Wyndham Lewis will be published in June by New Directions.

HERBERT MARSHALL McLuhan, author of *The Mechanical Bride*, appears in *Shenandoah* for the third time.

MARVIN MUDRICK, professor of English at Santa Barbara College, was a contributor to the WYNDHAM LEWIS issue of *Shenandoah*.

ALAN NEAME is a young British poet who lives in Baghdad.

## ERRATUM

The first line in the fifth stanza of Archibald MacLeish's poem, "The Infinite Reason," which appeared in the Spring, 1954, issue of *Shenandoah* should read: "Until we read these faces, figures, flowers,".

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